DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 440 284 CE 080 054

TITLE	Beginnings III: A Publication of Adult Student Writing of the Ohio Writers' Conference.
INSTITUTION	Ohio State Literacy Resource Center, Kent.
PUB DATE	2000-04-07
NOTE	111p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Ohio Literacy Resource Center, Research 1, 1100 Summit St., P.O. Box 5190, Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242-0001. Tel: 800-765-2897 (Toll Free); Tel: 330-672-2007; Fax: 330-672-4841; e-mail: olrc@literacy.kent.edu, Web site: http://literacy.kent.edu. For full text: http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/Beginnings3/index.html.
PUB TYPE	Creative Works (030)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; Adult Learning; *Adult Literacy; *Adult Students; Biographies; *Creative Writing; Essays; Family Life; *Literacy Education; Personal Narratives; Poetry; Reminiscence; Short Stories; State Programs; Student Attitudes; *Student Writing Models
IDENTIFIERS	*Ohio

ABSTRACT

This document contains 58 poems, essays, letters, personal narratives, reminiscences, and short stories that were selected from 255 entries submitted by 170 adult student writers in Ohio. The student-authored literary works, which adult educators can use in their adult literacy classrooms, are grouped under the following themes: family, learning, nature, feelings, and reminiscences. Among the titles included are the following: "Raising Special Children" (Sharon Sheppard-Scott); "I Finally See" (Sharon Harsh); "The Bloodshed of Our Children" (Vickie Hargraves); "Brittany's Brace" (Norma J. King); "Daddies" (Cindy Wright); "My Success" (Tracy Graham); "To Mommy's Little Angel, Rebecca" (Amy Chandler); "An Evening Death" (Toni White); "A Single Mother's Reward" (Sharon Cavell); "Su Ah and Hyun Ah" (Kum Sun Kim); "Innocence Taken" (Regina Mulkey); "An Unsolved Fire" (Karen S. Smith); "A Tribute to the Step-Up Experience" (Karen Bowman); "Never Give Up" (Ruan Luong); "Safety at Home" (Kathy Brooks); "My Life's Dream" (Nora Thomas); "The Greatness in Yourself" (Stacy Jones); "Santa's Wife a Missing" (Karen Safewright); "Angle of the Lake" (Phil Edwards); "Maybe Tomorrow I'll Find What I'm After (A Man in Search of a Love)" (Lonnie Littleton); "My Old Kentucky Home" (Glen A. Baldwin); "Ramadan" (Traci Cornist), "Sharecropping" (Harold Lester); "Christmas in Ukraine" (Zenia Kovalska); "Hair Day" (Norma J. King); and "Wildmen" (Ken Tallon). Concluding the document are biographies of the authors and a list of honorable mention winners. (MN)

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ED 440 284

Beginnings III

A publication of adult student writing of the
Ohio Writers' Conference

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The Ohio Literacy Resource Center
April 7, 2000

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Foreword

The Ohio Literacy Resource Center (OLRC) proudly welcomes you to *Beginnings III*. The pieces in this third and largest collection of poems, essays, and short stories were selected from 255 entries and 170 adult student writers in Ohio. These authors and their instructors were honored at a statewide conference in Columbus in the spring of 2000.

Many people have contributed to the success of this effort. Jim Bowling, Assistant Director - Office of Career-Technical and Adult Education within the Ohio Department of Education, has contributed his enthusiastic personal and professional support since the project began. The project would not have begun without the vision, encouragement, and hard work of Nancy Padak, the OLRC faculty advisor. Janie Johnson, the new Director of the OLRC, generously committed the time and resources of the Center to the project.

Bryan Bardine developed and supervised all the behind-the-scenes forms and procedures and worked with OLRC staff on the arrangements for the conference and publication of *Beginnings III*. Special thanks go to: Penny Graves for formatting; Maureen Plum for conference arrangements; Carrie Spence as liaison with publications; Lisa White, Dianna Baycich, Connie Sapin, Kathy Pierce, and Dale Sherman for reading submissions; and Andrea Yates and Jackie Pitzulo for typing and mailing. Chris Fullerton created the new cover design.

The content of *Beginnings III* is truly authentic literature. Adult literacy students can easily identify with the emotions and events in the lives of these authors whose biographies are included in this volume for the first time. Teachers will find short, interesting readings for classroom use under the themes of Family, Learning, Nature, Feelings, and Reminiscences. This volume joins *Beginnings* and *Beginnings II* online at <literacy.kent.edu>. The staff of the OLRC wishes you an enjoyable beginning adventure in reading the work of Ohio writers.

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Family

Raising Special Children

I have heard the saying, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." In my circumstances the "village" was not there. I alone was the village.

On August 2, 1980, my first daughter was born. I named her Irene. She was 16 inches long and weighed 6 lbs. 7 oz. I was a proud mom. I was nursing her when my doctor came in my room. He said that she was going to be a dwarf. The news was devastating to me. I held that little infant so close to me and prayed for strength and courage. When I was discharged from the hospital there was no "village" waiting at home. Her daddy did not warn me that all the females in his family have a history of a syndrome, which causes dwarfism and hearing and vision loss.

When Irene began to walk her physical health declined. She brought picture books close to her face. She watched TV close up. The ophthalmologist checked her vision. My one-year-old had to wear thick glasses. Her peers, church family, people in stores, out dining, everywhere we went they stared at her. She continued to bump into furniture even with her glasses on. I really began to worry. We ended up back at the ophthalmologist's office. The doctor wanted to do more tests. One of the tests required Irene to be put under anesthesia. After the test the doctor gave me the bad news. My two-year-old daughter's retina had detached. It was too far gone; surgery would not help. We got a second opinion. The second doctor did the surgery, but it left Irene's left eye deformed. My poor child suffered so at such a young age.

At the same time Irene was having vision problems, she was only partially hearing. I took her to an otolaryngologist. She said Irene would need hearing aids. So now I have a three-year-old toddler partially blind and hard of hearing! What was a mother to do?

First I let my child know she had my support. I am one person, but I became that "village" for my child. I attended lots of meetings for parents of children with medical

handicaps. She was in a special school for a year and a half. Then I decided to do things my way because this was the child The Divine had given me. I had her mainstreamed in school from kindergarten through 12th grade. I had her surrounded by people that do not have her problems. She was an A-B student.

Irene is now in college at Bowling Green State University. She got a full paid scholarship. Her major is in Journalism/German. She is a resident assistant in the dorm. She works for the BGSU newspaper as chief reporter. I am proud of her.

I have two other daughters affected by the same syndrome as Irene. Jessica is 16 and Jacqueline is 9. Both girls are mainstreamed in parochial schools and doing well.

Writing this essay has been painful. It has brought back memories of very difficult times. I am proud of my girls. Irene has worked hard to overcome her disabilities and succeed. Who would have thought she would be able to be where she is today? My other girls are working hard, too. They have endured the jokes and ridicule of others and still stayed loving.

I am also proud of myself. I am a single mother with minimal formal education. I have started and stopped attending GED classes many many times. My kids would need me, so I would not be able to come. Yet I was able to be an advocate for my children. Irene says I have always gone against the norm by fighting to keep her out of special education classes. I helped my girls become the people they are today. I was the "village" for my special children.

-- *Sharon Sheppard-Scott*

I Finally See

From hear to touch
and touch to see
From see to walk
and run to me.

I hold your hand,
you let it go.
You say it's time
for me to grow.

From love and learn
and understand to
know one day you
will be men.

You try so hard
to figure out
just what life
is all about.

From start to end
it's great to see
just what life
has given me.

The day will come
for me to see
what great young men
you've grown to be.

A kiss a hug
is all that's left.
It's time for you
to do your best.

But as you walk
away from me,
I finally see
my boys have grown
just like me.

-- Sharon Harsh

The Bloodshed of Our Children

Where does it all begin? Where does this anger come from within ourselves? I'm going back in time to a young child again in school. "Everyone hates me. They all laugh and make fun of me." I'm poor. Everyone is thinking that they are better than I am. I have no friends. Sometimes I feel like I want to die. Then that raging urge comes over me.

Even the teachers have said and done things to us kids to make us want to take revenge. We resented the popular kids. The teachers' pets were the ones with good grades and especially the ones who had everything we envied.

We were ignored and pushed to the side. We weren't wearing name-brand clothes, like Sally over there. So we formed our own little clubs and rebelled against the kids and the school.

There have been eight school shootings in the past year. Our schools have become war zones. Where will our kids' education come from? How will it be affected? I interviewed several children over the Internet who did not want to be identified. They said it would not stop there. Most kids said the same thing to me. They said the teachers didn't like some of the kids for some reason or another. Some had an older brother or sister who gave them trouble. Some weren't liked because they had learning disabilities.

My statement is "Bring back the Ten Commandments in school." Let us be able to pray. Let us work together as a team, not as prisoners of war! The bloodshed will continue, these kids have said. One student said the truth is anything you want it to be. Another student said the Commandment about "Thou shalt not kill" is only a statement.

Our kids are brought up being taught violence by seeing violence, using violence, and growing up in single - parent homes. There again the Ten Commandments would stand clear on these issues.

Living creates fear in our kids. It causes them to be disturbed. Don't lie about people. It creates insecurity, and you lose your soul.

The school system makes these kids feel like they have no ground to stand on, as if school kids are fighting a losing battle.

I had a 10-year-old child tell me he couldn't wait until he had the chance to kill a kid, that now this is the cool thing to do.

If you didn't go against the good and turn to the bad, then you would be an outcast.

If you stood up for what is right, you would be killed. This has already been proven in the Oklahoma shooting!

Our schools are no longer learning places. They are battlefields. There will be a lot more bloodshed of our children. We as parents must stop this. Also, it could be your son or daughter who will die in the next shooting. These kids have no fear. They've grown up in dysfunctional families. This is where it begins. Where will it stop? It's not about owning handguns. It's the person behind the handgun. These kids need help. They just think it's the cool thing to do.

Putting these kids in prison only makes them get the attention, and then they feel like they've won.

So I beg of you, in the next presidential election let the leader make this a service issue, a number one priority. And let us stand together as a nation and take our schools back! Consider allowing the Ten Commandments and prayer back in our schools. What else do we have to lose?

-- Vickie Hargraves

Angels of Mine

My angels can't be found in
Story books or on T.V.
My angels carry no halos
Nor do they bear wings.

Their spirits are high;
Their smiles always warm.
Eyes of an angel,
Angel of mine.

Hearts full of love, not knowing of hate,
If we learned from our children,
We could all get along.

My angels are small,
And so they are young.
They've changed my life,
These angels of mine.

Dedicated to my sons, Cody and Mitchell

-- Paula Darovich

The Power Of Love

Since 1989, I have had the custody of my twin nephews. The kids were badly in need of help. Since I have no children, I thought it was the right thing to do to make a good home for them.

It started on a hot summer day. I went to my sister's house to find the kids home alone. To top it off they had bumps and bruises all over their bodies.

The house was nasty. . . .clothes everywhere, dishes piled up that smelled like they had been there for days. The toilet had run over with water all over the floor. There were beer cans on the table, wine left in glasses in the refrigerator, no food, and no locks on the doors. The boys' clothing was not clean. They looked hungry.

I called my mother and told her the conditions of the boys and the house. She told me to bring them over to her house. So, I did. When I got there she looked them over and found what I had found. She called 241-KIDS. The authorities came over to my mother's house. At the time my sister did not know what was going on. When the lady got there she looked the boys over and found everything that we described to be true.

She took pictures and asked the boys and my sister questions. My sister refused to answer. One or two days later the authorities called and asked my mother if she could bring the boys and their mom to Human Services that day. She said, "Yes." When my sister heard that, she went into a rage talking about what she was going to do, what the authorities aren't going to do, and what my mom and I weren't going to do. A few weeks later she came to her senses and admitted that she had a drug problem and that she had to give the children up until she got help. So my mother called to ask me if I would take the boys until my sister got her life together because she wasn't able to care for them. I said yes, of course.

From that day on, it was rough, but I knew as time passed that things would get better for the three of us. When

the school year began I really started having big problems with the boys. Teachers were calling everyday. Just about every week the kids were getting suspended from school because of their behavior. It was stressing me out, and I didn't know what to do. I tried whipping them, but that made matters worse. I tried punishments, and that helped for a few minutes until I started feeling sorry for them and letting them off the hook.

I was having a hard time getting anybody to help me with the boys. I called 241-KIDS and asked them what I could do. They told me to take the boys to counseling, they signed me up with a counselor. We went to a counselor two days a week. It helped for a while, but it seemed like the kids started getting worse. Finally, my mom and I came up with another plan.

The kids ended up going down south with their grandfather. I felt like that was the best thing for them. Maybe being down south with my father, going to school down there where they could get a better education would help them succeed. Perhaps having a man in their life would help.

Since the boys have been with my father they have improved very much. They get A's, B's, and C's on their lessons. Their behavior has also improved.

My mom and I are confident that we did what was best for my nephews. Maybe someday they can be reunited with their mother and be a family again.

-- Vicki Hobbs

Silly Story

Holly and Gabbi were told it was night time. They know that means pajama time, time for bed. Their nicknames are Jolly Holly and Crabby Gabbi; unfortunately, at this time, Holly isn't so jolly and Gabbi is especially crabby. So we wearily climb the stairs to their room, and they jump up on their beds and bounce a few times on their mattresses. After a few minutes they settle down, Gabbi with her Lady dog and Holly with her Kelly doll. As I try to sneak quietly from the room, I hear them ask me to read them a story from their favorite book.

Their favorite book is about the sun, moon, and stars. As I sit and read to them about the man on the moon, his mother the sun and sisters the stars, the girls lay peacefully on their beds and gaze at the glow-in-the-dark moon and stars on their walls. As I am about to leave, I look back and see them sleeping and snoring, safe and sound in their beds, waiting for the dream catcher.

-- Shannon Showalter

Brittany's Brace

Brittany is eight years old. She is three feet, five inches tall and weighs 39 pounds. All her friends have outgrown her, and even younger children are her size or bigger. Her younger brother, who is five, has caught up with her and is passing her by. That is part of the Klippel-Feil Syndrome. She has had open-heart surgery and reconstructive fusion surgery for her neck and collarbone.

She had to wear a halo cast that went to her lower hips. After a few weeks, one of the screws in the front of her head started slipping and moving toward her eye. She had to go back in the hospital for the doctors to put her in a body cast. The new cast covered her from the top of her head to her lower hips. There was a little hole in the top for her ponytail to hang out. There was an opening for her little face. The cast was very heavy, but she learned to get up and down by herself. She even went roller-skating. We noticed that while she was skating, every so often she would stop and reach down and hold her knees. We mentioned it to the doctor, thinking something may be wrong with her knees where they had put pins through them to hang weights from them after her last surgery.

"What, she went roller-skating!" he exclaimed. "There's nothing wrong with her knees. She was probably resting them carrying that heavy cast around." He couldn't get over her skating in that heavy cast.

The doctor kept a watch on Brittany for about a year, and then he told her she would have to go into a brace. He said she had a monstrous spine, and the brace would help to put her next surgery off until she was at least ten years old. Waiting would give her a little more time to grow. He would have to put a steel rod in her back, and once he did that, she wouldn't grow anymore. He hoped that if she wore the brace, he could put the surgery off until she was at least ten years old; but he wasn't sure he could wait until then.

The doctors have done everything they know to do to get her to grow, but she doesn't grow much at all. We are praying for a miracle.

She was fitted for her brace. Her Grandpa took her to pick it up a couple weeks later. Brittany cried when she saw the brace, and Grandpa said you could see the hurt come over her face and in her eyes. It broke his heart to see how she was hurting. She told the technician, "I didn't know this was going to involve my neck." It has a steel ring that goes around the neck and holds the neck straight. She could only move her head slightly up and down in a nod. With the brace, she couldn't even do that. The brace looks like a harness. Brittany said she was not wearing that brace.

The technician did a few things, and then he told Brittany she was free to go. The brace was lying on the bed. She got up, walked over to the bed, picked up the brace, held it in her arms, and carried it out the door.

Then they had to go to the hospital to see the doctor so he could put the brace on Brittany and get an x-ray to make sure it fit right. The brace had to go back for adjustments to be made.

Brittany is having a hard time adjusting to the brace. She can't put it on or take it off by herself because a screw closes it together at the back of the neck and one strap closes in the back. It has two straps that come from the back to close in the front.

She was afraid the kids would make fun of her, but most of them understand. She didn't want to wear it the two days a week that she takes gym because she is limited in what she can do. We were sitting at the dinner table, and she begged us not to make her wear it. She was crying, and I could not keep the tears from my own eyes. She looked so pitiful with big tears streaming down her little face that was all red and blotchy. My heart was breaking for her. So we didn't make her wear it to gym.

Brittany was finding all kinds of excuses for not wearing her brace; she said it hurt her neck and her back, so

Grandpa took her to the technician to get adjustments. She told the technician it didn't hurt; she just didn't want to wear it. The technician told her if she didn't wear the brace that her doctor would put her back in a cast that she would have to wear all the time. She is supposed to be wearing the brace 23 hours a day with one hour off for her bath time.

We are praying that she will wear her brace like she is supposed to until she has to go back to the doctor and that she will start growing really fast.

Even with all this, Brittany has a wonderful sense of humor and she enjoys playing and doing things. She was playing checkers with her 11-year-old brother and he was winning, so Grandpa helped Brittany out a little and she won. She was so excited because she won, and her brother agreed to play another game of checkers with her. She was getting the board ready, and she said, "I LOVE MY LIFE!"

-- Norma J. King

Daddies

Sometimes the pain is just too much
When you know you no longer
See their face or feel their touch.
Everyone says "daddy's little girl,"
But what do you do when he's ripped from your world?

Daddies are there to comb your hair
And frighten away your cares.
Daddies are made to be strong
And show you right from wrong.

When daddy's taken from you, what do you do?
Then I sat and thought
About everything my daddy taught.
He taught me to be strong and always carry on.
He taught me to do my best and never quit.

Even when life dealt him a raw deal,
He stayed strong and tried to carry on.
He did his best and never quit.
He always held his head high and kept going on.

So, Daddy, this promise is to you.
I will stay strong and carry on.
I will do my best and never quit.
I will hold my head high and keep going on.

I know you're looking down on me
With a smile on your face,
A heart full of pride,
Because you know I did not quit.

I am very lucky to have the life I have, and I am determined to keep improving every day of my life.

All any of us can do is keep going on and trying over and over any time life knocks us down.

-- Cindy Wright

Marriage
Happy, Loving
Helping, Sharing, Caressing
Unity, Joy, Boredom, Separation
Disturbing, Concealing, Ignoring
Sad, Hateful
Divorce

-- Anh Phuong Nguyen

My Success

My childhood was very lonely, and my life was not stable. My dad and mom were always moving. Dad never paid the rent. He used the money on his cars. I remember not having any special holidays, like Christmas, and doing without food. I was abused on a day-to-day basis. I never had the things I needed for school. I remember how I loved school but wasn't able to do the things I needed to make my school life better.

When I was fourteen, I thought I was in love. I became a mother at fifteen and got married at sixteen. I was going through a lot just to keep my sanity, but at the same time, I wanted to become very successful in life. I wanted to help my children be successful too, but I quit school.

I had been married for a while and had ten children, when one day my 13-year-old daughter came to me and asked if I could help her with her homework. I was really struggling to help her and realized that I didn't know ANYTHING! Right then I made three commitments. I told my daughter that I wanted to buy a house, to help my children be the best that they could be, and to go back to school to get my GED.

All eight of my daughters looked at me with great big smiles and said, "Mommy, go for it! We'll see who gets the most A's." I listened to my kids and did what my heart and soul told me to do. I got my supplies together and went to the area ABLE class and enrolled.

Now I am attending class and working hard. I am really loving it because my children are bragging about their mommy doing her best. I look at all of them and say, "Thank you for the encouragement and strength."

-- *Tracy Graham*

To Mommy's Little Angel, Rebbeca

There's an angel up above.
There's an angel God sent me to love.

There's an angel, and she's mine.
There's an angel I'll see in time.

There's an angel God has called home
Up to Heaven is where she has flown.

There's an angel deep in my heart.
We're not together.
Nor are we apart.

My little angel God gave me to love.
He took her back and set her free.

I'll see my angel again I pray.
I'll do my best until that day.

There's an angel my arms miss to hold.
When I lost her,
It took my very soul.

Although I know she's happy where she is,
I miss her so much.
I wish she was here for me to kiss.

-- Amy Chandler

An Evening Death

Rose's husband claimed he loved her, but how can you beat and murder the one you claim to love?

Can jealousy, obsession, possessiveness drive you to the breaking point? It did for Rose's case. A victim of domestic violence, a victim of murder. It all took place on a cool evening night.

I've tried to imagine the thoughts going through her mind. I'm sure it was full of fright. For being held against your will can make you feel ill. . .was it so distressful and frightening that minutes felt like hours, hours like days? Was she feeling as though she was in a maze? No place to run; no way out even though it was a small frame house. She could peer out the window, but what could she see? Was it an ocean of red and blue lights flashing?

Could she even hear the sirens fill the evening air? Because by now men in blue were everywhere, but yet Rose's husband didn't seem to care. For in a rage and no despair he claimed her life and ended his too.

Rose was given no choice but to leave her children behind. From time to time they will cry. They will always ask that question, "Why?" Through the years they will heal, but that question, why, will always be there.

This was clearly a woman who once lived in the dark but shall now and forever live in the light. Rose is free at last to live in peace and not in fear for her life.

-- Toni Whitt

A Single Mother's Reward

Teach your children and they will teach their children. As a mother of four young adults, I can reflect back to the values I taught them as they were growing up. I have two boys and two girls, Tony, Vanessa, Janice, and Tommie, born in that order. Although I was a young single mother, the values and ideas that I installed in my children during this time have made them prosperous and productive adults. I taught them family values; respect for others; and to be a good, dependable, hard worker.

One highlight of that time was that I never had to worry about my girls or boys "stubbing their toes," which in the old days meant getting pregnant or getting a young lady pregnant. They waited until they were older and able to accept the responsibility of being a parent.

First I would like to show some of the camaraderie of our close-knit family and the individualism of each member. Tony, my oldest, was considered the godfather because I had to work; Tony would see that the other kids would get up and ready for breakfast and school. When they got home, he made sure that they did their homework and chores. Without him I do not think it would have been as easy to work and raise my little family. His ability to take charge has carried over to his adult life. Not only did Tony take charge at home, he also excelled at school. Many times Tony got on honor roll and maintained a high grade point average. Tony still displays his value of being a responsible person.

Vanessa, my second child, was active and a little defiant, until we had a little talk. I had to show her what we called "hard love." We were discussing how her girlfriends were allowed to do as they pleased. She felt that she was old enough to do the same. We were standing by the window in her bedroom, and I told her if she thought that she old enough to do as she pleased, then she needed to be out of my house. I put her out of the window and told her to go see if the grass was greener on the other side. I assure you that it did not take

long before she realized that there is no love like a mother's love. She found out that the grass is not greener on the other side. Vanessa took a hard look at her life because of that incident. That experience taught her to wait until she was married. She has become a young mother of two lovely and healthy kids of her own. Vanessa values her family, and it shows in the way that she handles her family.

Janice, my third child, was known as Mother Mac because she was the one who made sure that the meals were cooked and everybody ate. I remember on one occasion when I was ill she made me breakfast in bed and cooked whatever the kids wanted. She enjoyed trying new recipes. I guess you can say that the kitchen was Janice's domain. Janice also learned from the incident between Vanessa and me. Janice says she learned to appreciate what you have and give thanks for what you receive. I never had any problems with Janice wanting to be grown or to "smell her own piss," which is another saying from the old school. This saying meant that she wasn't scared to handle the many hardships of a real adult life. Janice found that being a responsible adult enabled her to raise her little girl, Shannice. The way that she is raising Shannice shows me that I did have some influence on her life as she was growing up, and she turned into someone that any mother would love.

Tommie, my baby, was the only one of my children who you could expect to do anything weird or funny. I remember his last two days of his senior year in high school. He dressed up as we did in the sixties with all the trimmings, bell bottoms, platform shoes, and a pinstripe suit with a polka dot shirt. When Tommie was a little boy, we would miss certain items and try to find out what had happened to them. On Christmas day they would reappear as Christmas gifts from Tommie. I look back at these incidents fondly, and I can say that I am proud of Tommie. He graduated from high school and joined the Army, which helped to enrich his value of respect and dependability. He became a responsible father of his daughter Malanie.

Now I have explained the different individual personalities and how they came together to form our happy family. I am not saying that we did not have problems, but what families do not? With the love we had we were able to override any problems that arose. I feel that the love and affection that we had in our lives reflected in how my children are raising their children. Tony has two girls, Tiana and Airoena. Vanessa has Carlos Jr. and Vanessa Jr.; Janice has Shannice, and Tommie has a daughter, Malanie. As you can see, I am the proud grandmother of six wonderful grandchildren. I can say that the love and the values that I taught my children are being taught to their children. What else could a mother ask for? There is no greater love than a mother's love. We must teach our children that with good values and a parent's love and guidance, they can receive everything they desire from life. Finally, I'd like to say to all parents that it is time we thank our children for making parenthood a delightful and enjoyable experience.

-- Sharon Cavell

A Son's Love

In 1997, I first learned of my father's cancer. A letter came in the mail informing me that my father had lung cancer, and the disease had spread into his liver. After reading the letter, I was very upset and in disbelief. My father always smoked for as long as I can remember, and I know that smoking can increase the chances of getting some form of cancer.

In the fall of 1997 I went to see my father who lives in Holland, and I discovered that he was doing pretty well. This was because he decided to take chemotherapy treatments right away so he could have a longer life span.

I went back to see him again in 1998, and I could see then that his cancer was taking over his life more and more. My father was fighting his cancer in a very brave way because sometimes the chemotherapy would make him very sick and uncomfortable. Without taking his chemotherapy, he would have passed away in a couple of months. As long his body would accept the treatments he could prolong his life a little longer. He was courageous dealing with the numerous side effects of his treatments. Every time the cancer became painful for him, he would get another round of chemotherapy.

During that same year, he also suffered a mild heart attack, and walking became very difficult for him after that. Then in 1999, he became more and more ill and also bedridden. A few months later, I went to see him again and I could see right away that he wasn't doing very well. The cancer had now spread into his brain, and he could only breathe with the help of oxygen. Each day I was there, he became weaker and weaker, but luckily, I could still talk to him because his mind was still sharp.

Then on the last evening before I was to go home, my father and I had a very comforting and warm conversation. Less than two hours later, he passed away. I was glad that I was able to be with him during his last days on earth and that I could close this chapter in a warm and proper way.

Goodbye, Dad. May your soul rest in peace.

-- Bart Rethmeier

Su Ah and Hyun Ah

Beautiful daughters
Both very special
Best friends to each other but with
Very different personalities.
The older one enjoys playing the piano
While the younger one finds gymnastics fun.
The younger one is always in a hurry
And therefore she can be very messy.
Su Ah holds her feelings into herself.
While Hyun Ah is very sensitive, loving, and giving.
Both are good to me
And hold a special place in my heart.

-- Kum Sun Kim

Innocence Taken

"Come here baby girl, let me see you smile.
Sit on my lap for a little while.
You are so special to me.
Let me touch, let me see."
He touched, he took my innocence.
"Nobody has to know.
I love you; I told you so.
They wouldn't understand how I feel.
Be a good little girl; it's no big deal."
I feel so dirty, I don't know why.
This bad feeling I can't deny.
He kept it a secret, he took my faith.
I was a victim of this bliss.
My dignity or worth doesn't exist.
The day came when he died.
I never even once cried.
My mother wanted me to say goodbye.
I always wondered when he would die.
He's been gone for years; the pain is still here.
But Jesus whispers in my ear,
I dealt with him.

-- Regina Mulkey

An Unsolved Fire

On Monday, February 13, 1989, I stood in the front yard of the house where I grew up and watched it burn down. I've never felt so helpless, ever. In the 24 years of my life, I had never seen my father cry, but he did that day. There was a sadness in his eyes that I'll never forget. Imagine losing everything you've worked for in a matter of minutes.

When the fire was finally out and we were allowed to go inside, what we saw was unbelievable. There were no walls left separating my two brothers' rooms and the bathroom. My oldest brother, Larry, had no closet left. The only clothing he had to wear was the work uniform that he had on. The front part of the house looked better. The walls were still standing, but as we took a closer look, we knew that all of my family's furniture and clothes were damaged with smoke and water.

My family could no longer stay in their home until it was rebuilt. My mother was afraid that the same thing would happen again. The firefighters could not determine the cause of the fire. They wrote, "Cause Unknown." My father took a loss on that house because he had never increased his fire insurance over the years.

My mom, dad, and my two brothers, Larry and Darrell, had to split up for a month. My mom and dad decided to stay with me, and my brothers chose to stay with Jean, a dear friend of Larry's. My mother was devastated. She was in the habit of fixing supper every night for her household. She had been doing this all of her life. So every morning when my husband and I went to work, we took Mom to Jean's house so she could cook for everybody at the same time. This pleased her a great deal and gave her some relief. She never said, but I knew she was counting the days until she could have her own house again.

My father was totally heartbroken. The morning after the fire, I knocked on the door to get him up for work. He told me to come in, so I did. He was sitting on the edge of the

bed with the blankest look on his face. He was at a loss for words. Only tears rolled down his face. I went over to him and hugged and kissed him and told him that I loved him. I didn't know what to say or do. I had never been so speechless. The pain that my father suffered reminded me of a death. Nobody really knows the disappointment of a fire unless they experience it themselves. It's a hard thing to get past. I don't know if my father has ever gotten completely over it yet.

I went with my family to go through their belongings and to salvage what they could. What a nightmare that was! Just looking at the damage was enough for us to know that had that fire happened at night, my brothers probably wouldn't have survived, and maybe not my parents. This whole experience gave us a new respect for fire that we've never had before.

I spent the biggest part of my time with Larry. His room was the most damaged. He didn't have much left. But he was so grateful for what we did find. He was like a child at Christmas time. He always made the best of every situation, that brother of mine. What was really neat was his Bible was left untouched. The other books right next to it were destroyed. But the Bible was as good as new. Now that's incredible!

A month after the fire, my father bought another house, and he went to the furniture store and bought a whole house full of new things. He also bought my brothers a new stereo to replace the one they both lost in the fire. Now that was indeed a special surprise! My sister discovered that she was pregnant with the first grandchild. That helped our family get past this terrible tragedy a little more easily. Slowly things started getting back to normal again. But I will never forget that awful day, and the events that took place.

Note: In April 1998 at about 10:00 p.m., I finished the draft for this story. I was so proud that I wanted to share it with my brother Larry, whom I was very close to. I was so excited that I almost got my two children out of bed to go over to his

house. (I didn't have a phone and I lived alone with my children.) But I didn't go; I thought I was being silly. I decided to wait until the next day. As I lay in bed, I could feel an urge, almost like a force, to go to my brother, but I didn't. It all seemed too crazy. The next day though, it was too late. You see, on April 21, 1998, sometime between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., my brother Larry Delph was murdered behind his house. Maybe I could have stopped him from being killed and maybe not. But it would have meant a lot to me to have been there that night. So the next time, if I ever have such a strong pull, no matter how stupid it may seem, I'm going to follow it. And I hope that you, the reader, will also.

-- Karen S. Smith

Learning

Miscommunications

Since I began living in the U.S.A., I have had a lot of experiences that I would not have had if I lived in Japan. Now, I try to remember them. Some of them make me laugh, and some of them make me feel sorry.

There were many reasons why these things happened to me. However, I know the biggest reason is that I was not able to communicate with Americans much then. I could read English, but I did not speak or listen to English well. I did not know the American way of thinking, their customs, and their culture, either. Here are two of my funny experiences.

In the Restroom

I was bewildered when I went into a public restroom in the U.S. The reason was that I was able to see a person's feet inside each stall from under the stall's door and wall. Also I sometimes found a little space between the door and wall; consequently, I was afraid that I would be able to see the person inside even if I was not trying to peep.

In my country, it is usually impossible to see inside a stall from the outside in a restroom. I do not know exactly, but each door and wall is higher than six feet at least. I have never seen a space between the door and wall in each stall. In Japan I believe that nobody can see inside of a stall from the outside since it is very secret.

One day, I went to a restroom in an U.S. restaurant. There were some young ladies, and they enjoyed talking. I usually only hear English conversations as a noise if I do not listen too carefully. Therefore, I did not care what they were talking about at that time.

Soon after I went into a toilet stall, those ladies went out of the restroom. Then, it became quiet in the restroom. I heard a different person's voice a little bit later, but I did not pay attention at first. I heard the same voice again. I knew there were only two people -- a lady in the next stall and me -- in the restroom. She asked me something, but I did not

understand what she asked. I was confused in the toilet stall, but I just said, "Yes?" Since she did not say anything again, I was a little relieved and went out the toilet stall. While I was washing my hands, the lady came out of the toilet stall.

She looked very angry. She glared at me and said something; however, I did not understand her. I said nervously, "I cannot understand English well." She roughly said a few words to me and went out of the restroom.

I did not understand why that lady was so angry. I was not sure what I should do at that time? I could not guess anything. I also experienced an unpleasant feeling.

I asked some friends and my English teachers about that situation because I was anxious about it. I finally got an answer. That lady must have asked me to give her toilet tissue! It was possible for me to give her a piece of tissue because there was enough space under the wall in this American stall, unlike Japan. However, since I had never asked and heard "Give me tissue" in a toilet stall before, I could not even guess anything.

I now understand that this situation could happen again, but such a case has never happened to me since.

Greetings

When we see a person whom we know, we usually greet the person. I guess that it is common all over the world. Greeting is very important. Sometimes we may be judged as to our character by how we greet others.

In my country -- Japan -- we usually bow with some greeting words. When we see friends, we bow lightly. We just move our head ahead a little bit. When we see superiors, seniors, elders, and so on, we bow deeply. We usually move our head about thirty degrees ahead slowly and move back slowly. We show our respect to the person when we move our heads lower than the other person's head.

We usually do not touch the person's body when we greet. If we touch the person's body when we do a normal

greeting, it might include a very special meaning. They might love each other, for example.

I had heard that Americans sometimes shake hands as a greeting. When a person offers me his or her hand, I was told to shake it firmly. If I show my hand limply, Americans would feel badly toward me.

I guess that shaking hands is a very common mannerism for Americans but not for Japanese. Therefore, we make mistakes accidentally when we shake hands. We are often flustered at a moment when somebody offers a hand. Then we stretch out our hand in great haste. Moreover, we hesitate about touching other people, so we stretch out our hands modestly and limply.

I believed that I understood how to shake hands. I always paid attention only "to shake hands tightly!" when I greeted Americans.

One day I went to a casual party at a friend's house. I saw many new faces there. We introduced each other and usually shook hands. I intended to do so in my usual way, in other words, "to shake hands tightly when I greet Americans."

"Ouch!" a man shouted with laughter as soon as I shook his hand. Such a reaction was the first time for me. At first I did not understand what happened. Soon I became aware of my misunderstanding.

It is very natural that if I shake somebody's hand with all my might, the person would have pain. I cannot remember how many people's hands I have shaken with all my might. Everybody smiled at me without saying "Ouch!" when I shook his or her hand. I am sure that they must have endured their hand's pain. If the man had not said anything, I would not have realized that my hand shaking was too strong, yet.

I am sorry for people who felt pain when shaking hands with me...I meant no harm.

-- Yuki Ohashi

A Tribute to the Step-Up Experience

Soft-spoken Shirley,
Never-late Lou,
Debbie's percentages,
And decimals too.

Hazel's hard candy,
Louisa's quick wit,
Karen's endurance,
Kathy's etiquette.

Customer service
With Suzanne was inspired.
We don't know by what,
But we're glad she was hired.

Nancy and Gene,
We found you compelling.
Our self-esteem's grown,
Our egos are swelling.

The skills that we've learned,
The friends that we've met,
The laughs that we've shared,
We'll not soon forget.

Andrea and Peggy,
You've helped us become
So very job savvy.
Hey World!! Here we come!!!!

-- Karen Bowman

Never Give Up

For me, the English language is a big problem. It is an obstacle to my studying. I am always anxious about how to speak and write well in English. I never think that I will become a good speaker or a writer. I just need enough to understand what the instructor explains in class and communicate with people effectively. I feel like this because English is the key for me to open the door of knowledge.

When I was a high school student, the English language was very strange and not interesting for me in my country of Vietnam. Students were mostly given written homework to do, but very rarely spoke English at school or at home. At that time, I felt the English language was only useful for some people who worked with Americans. So at school, I did not concentrate on English. Also, I thought that the English language was only necessary for me if I was living in the U.S.

Now I know how important and necessary English is. I am always confused and embarrassed when I have to communicate with people around me at work, especially on the telephone. It makes me frustrated when I can't understand what people are saying. I often ask for people to write it down for me, and then I use the dictionary as a tool to understand the meaning.

In these situations, I have learned more about vocabulary and have become more interested in the English language. I have taken pre-GED classes at my workplace – Pierre Foods' Learning Center. At home, I concentrate on my English, practicing reading and writing. I believe that the best way to improve my English is PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

Reading "Love Your Problems" from the book named Becoming a Master Student, I have learned that accepting and admitting the problems I have with English can help me to learn more about it. Now I am on my way to

improving my English. In my mind, I always will tell myself, "NEVER GIVE UP!"

-- Ruan Luong

Four Steps

Two steps forward and four steps
back. That's the way it's always been.
I can't move ahead for falling behind.
What's a girl supposed to do?
I try to be on top of things, but when I
least expect it, I fall flat on my face.
Four steps forward and two steps back.
That's the way it's going to be now.

-- Karen S. Smith

Safety At Home

The home is considered to be a man's castle, a place to relax, a place of renewal from our busy lives. Therefore, it should be safe and secure, keeping harm at a distance.

Many elements are important in securing our homes. We must look at the outside structure of our dwellings. Is the roof in good repair? Are all the windows intact with storms and locks? Are the doors and storm doors well fitting and supplied with secure locks?

The inside of our dwellings could have hidden problems that may threaten our lives or be financially costly. Faulty electrical wiring, that we never see, could make our homes death traps. A furnace in bad repair is dangerous and can be costly. A small drip in a faucet could cost hundreds of dollars a year. Leaks can also cause mold and fungus to grow, which is unhealthy to our respiratory systems. Another harm is carbon monoxide, which may give us headaches or flu-like symptoms. In older homes, one needs to be careful when stripping woodwork lest there be a coat of lead paint beneath other coats of paint.

The bathroom can be the most unsafe room in our homes. Always use a rubber mat in the tub; it is the number one place for falls in the home. Water and electricity are a deadly combination, so remember to unplug the personal care appliances and put them away after use.

The kitchen is the next spot in the home. Make sure electric appliances are unplugged and that extension cords are not strewn across floors or counters. Keep knives in a block or a separate drawer to prevent cuts. Put childproof locks on cupboards and drawers to prevent little ones from exploring. A fire extinguisher is necessary in this room.

Throughout our homes extension cords; cable cords; and cords from curtains, traverse rods, and mini blinds should be secured to prevent tripping or strangulation. Install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors; put non-slip pads

under throw rugs, and arrange furniture with a free walkway around it.

When our homes are as safe and secure as we can make them, we must think about keeping them safe. Use an outside light as well as a small inside light when you go out. Keep unknown visitors, even the pizza deliveryman, on your doorstep. Don't give personal information over the telephone. Be aware of your neighbors, their comings and goings, in order to recognize strangers in your neighborhood. No matter how safe and secure we think we are, there is always a chance of danger, so keep a list of emergency numbers by your phone and pray for God's protection.

-- Kathy Brooks

My Life's Dream

In my life I have many things that I need to do for myself. One of them is that I must get my GED diploma. This is one of the most important goals that I have set for myself. I have come to realize that studying and reading help me to learn and are essential to my everyday living.

It would be good if I could remember to pick up a book every day and just read for pleasure. Limiting the time that I watch television could also benefit me. I have books at my house on math and English that I could use everyday to help me. Another thing that is important for me to do is to show up for my GED classes as much as I can.

I have had the opportunity to attend three GED graduation ceremonies. Being there among the students who have achieved getting their GED diplomas made me feel good inside and happy for them. When the time comes for me to get mine, I want to feel just as good as those who have already accomplished their dreams.

I can visualize in my mind how I will feel when I receive my GED diploma. I will be relieved and very proud of myself. Accomplishing this goal will open doors for me. Getting my diploma will be something that I can cherish for the rest of my life.

-- Nora Thomas

Where Does It Hurt?

When you go to the doctor, they ask you, "Where does it hurt?" But if you have a very hard time reading, or do not know how to read, they do not ask you this. They ask you, "Why can't you read?"

When you go for help to learn to read, it takes all you have to walk through the door to get help, because it hurts to let someone know that you can't read.

This is one of the big hurts that adult learners have. So, when you start to learn, you need to talk about why you did not learn as a child. This helps to stop the hurt that most adult learners have, so you can learn and start to heal. The healing will take a long time, but if you talk and tell people your story a little at a time, you can heal faster.

People are not all bad. Some people like to listen and help adults learn. Some people call the healing process "shame," but I think that's a very bad hurt and you don't want to get hurt anymore.

This hurt makes you think you are no good or people are better than you are. Some adult learners think their voices mean very little. As an adult learner, I have learned that your voice is very powerful and people need to know how you feel, so you can get the help you need.

One more thing you need to know. Adult learners are not alone. There are many of us out there that can help you, if you need and want help.

-- Dale Sherman

A Place to Learn

Learning is fun.
Interesting subjects.
Valuing your education.
Encouraging each other.

Outstanding performances.
Asking questions.
Knowing how to succeed.
Studying hard.

Accomplishing a dream.
Becoming better educated.
Leaping toward a goal.
Entering a new beginning.

This was a project with a group of morning ABLE students:
-- Yuki Ohashi
-- Vicki Hargraves
-- Monica Bustos
-- Rosalba McCain
-- Sherril Knight
-- Kum Sun Kim

The Greatness in Yourself

In life you don't get many chances to correct the mistakes you make. I dropped out of high school when I was in the tenth grade. School was always a struggle for me. I would ask questions, but the teachers never really explained so I would understand completely.

Most people look back on their mistakes and feel as if there is nothing they can do. I have felt this way most of my life. I always felt that something was holding me back from what and who I wanted to be. One day a close friend told me, "I want to see you shine. I know you have greatness within yourself."

Everyone has a special talent they can find only if they explore what they fear the most. For me, it was the fear of not knowing if I was intelligent enough to get my GED or even to try. I would always set myself up to fail.

Although my parents gave up on me long ago, I have two wonderful children who have never given up hope for me. They are the only two who remain. I look into my children's eyes, and they see me as a person who can do anything, so how could I ever fail them? I want my children to be proud of their mother and to know she dropped out of school. I can't show them the importance of education if I don't show myself first. I don't want my children to feel empty like I have most of my life because I didn't finish my education.

My oldest child will be starting school this fall. I felt like this was the perfect time to continue my education. I always wanted to get my GED so I could go to college. I want my children to see that I can provide for them. I want to show them they can be anything they want to be. In order to be a good provider, I know in my heart it starts with getting my GED. I never knew how important continuing your education was until I became an adult.

Too many women settle for less when they have so much in life to explore. If you are a mother or just who you are, believe that everyone has greatness within. Don't let your

fears consume you. Break free, face your fears, and you will eventually shine.

-- Stacy Jones

Nature

What A Wonderful World

God gave this world to you and me.
It's priceless, yet it's also free.
It's beautiful beyond compare,
And He has left it in our care.
Every day begins anew,
Like a rose sparkling with the dew.
They blossom in the morning sun
And bloom until the day is done.
A little seed becomes a tree
And gives its shade to you and me.
Every creature great and small,
The Lord above has made them all.
The bear, the bee, the kangaroo,
All share this world with me and you.
High above us in the sky,
We watch the silver clouds go by.
They bring the gentle rain our way,
And rainbows brighten up our day.
And as we watch the setting sun,
Another perfect day is done.
God gave this world to you and me.
He lit the stars above.
By seeing all the things He made,
We know that God is love.

-- Andrea Calhoun

The Beach

As I was walking down the beach,
What do you think I found?
A very pretty seashell,
Laying on the ground.

I picked it up and washed it off,
And put it to my ear.
But a roar and ocean waves,
Were all that I could hear.

The gulls were circling up above,
In hunt for food to eat.
The waves were rolling in
And splashing at my feet.

I walked and walked for hours,
Taking it all in.
It's getting dark; it's time to go,
But I'll be back again.

-- Carol Rudder

Simple Beauty

To wake up on top of a mountain is one of the most breathtaking views of life and one of the few pleasures that is still free. I was but twelve and living in one of the many intervening valleys that are enclosed by the high mountains of West Virginia when I had the privilege to spend the night with a girlfriend. She lived at the peak of one such mountain, and she had the unique blessing to observe one of God's most spellbinding wonders every day.

Since it was the latter half of the 1950s, many people of the mountains of West Virginia still used outside bathrooms. It was a chilly spring morning, and the sun had not yet made an appearance. I awoke with the necessity of going outside. I lay in the strange bed for a little while, being basically a shy child and not wishing to stumble through an unfamiliar house. The urge to go outside, however, overtook me, and I could not ignore it any longer. I quietly navigated through the dark house to the outdoors, fearful that I would disturb my girlfriend's parents.

Even today, 41 years later, I remember the reverence and wonder inspired by what met my eyes that glorious morning. The darkness slowly fading into morning light. The veiling fog covering the hills and valleys. The crisp morning air, as bracing as it was refreshing.

Leisurely, the majestic, reddish-gold sun began to ascend the early morning sky, spreading its radiant light. Slowly, tantalizing, as if exposing an exquisite work of art, the prevailing darkness slid away, and the sun began to melt off the opaque mist.

Deep valleys and green forest steadily began to emerge from their slumber. The bubbling streams and brooks were uncovered, as the now large sun continued to climb upward, painting the sky with a multicolor of reds, oranges, and pinks, revealing even more of the hidden beauty of the mountain. Birds and an assortment of animals began their

never-ending search for food, filling the clear mountain air with God's music.

When the sun had reached a pinnacle in the cloudless sky and the fog had lifted, nothing but beauty remained to remind me of what a supreme artist our heavenly Father is, and that some things of beauty are still free for the taking.

I was awed by this picturesque masterpiece God had created, and I consider myself fortunate indeed to be granted the honor of witnessing that particular sunrise. From that moment on and for a long time thereafter, it changed the way I woke most mornings, knowing that even though I was not on the mountain but in a valley, God was still there working his enchantment each and every day.

I miss it most intensely now that I no longer have the opportunity to wake up to such simple pleasures and wish now that I could once more go back to the unpretentious wonder of childhood.

-- Frances Kay Jenkins

Rain
Wet, Cold
Dropping, Dripping, Beating
Gloom, Tremble, Warm, Pure
Shining, Spreading, Giving free
Boundless, Abundant
Sun

-- Ruan Luong

Skating
Exciting, entertaining
Speeding, gliding, dancing
Music, rink, park, sidewalk
Pacing, treading, stepping
Peaceful, quiet
Walking

-- Kum Sun Kim

Who Am I?

I am the sun that peeks at you in the soft hours of the morning, glistening brightly through the trees. My vibrant rays join the earth to the heavens above.

I am the rain that trickles from the sky, filling the streams and rivers. I sprinkle the flowers with light kisses of moisture in the morning so they grow strong and tall.

I am the wind that blows to create the waving waters. I like to whistle at times, to let you know that I am always near.

I am the grass, the trees, leaves, flowers and even the weeds. I am the artist of all glory that you behold in life.

I am the creator of a cultural rainbow -- the black, white, Oriental, Hispanic, and others that walk on this earth.

I am the eagle that soars from the highest mountain, the purring kitten, the roaring lion, and all the other creatures.

I am the first one to see the newborn child as it enters this world, and the first one to greet you as you depart from the earth and enter into my kingdom of everlasting life.

Who Am I?

If you are still puzzled by this question, go to your local bookstore and purchase a book known as the Bible. Open it to the first chapter (Genesis). You will find the answer to this question.

May God Bless & Enjoy your new life!

--Sherry Thornsberry

Feelings

A Best Friend...

Someone who is concerned with everything you do

Someone to call upon during good and bad times

Someone who understands whatever you do

Someone who tells you the truth about yourself

Someone who knows what you are going through at all times

Someone who does not compete with you

Someone who is genuinely happy for you when things go well

Someone who tries to cheer you up when things don't go well

Someone who is an extension of yourself without which you are not complete

MY BEST FRIEND IS YOU.

-- Sarah Vinion

Seek God in Troubled Times

Have you ever come down life's highway
And not known which way to go?
And it seemed hard to just carry out the day?
All you have to do is take time out to pray.

It doesn't take much to seek God.
Just go within your soul, where it's quiet in your heart, and start.
It doesn't matter what you say
Because God listens in every way.

The Lord is your friend and will guide you in troubled times until the end.
So remember going down life's highway,
There's always someone who cares,
Who will hold your hand, help you stand,
And never leave you alone.
Just seek God in troubled times.

-- Sandra Al-Deen

Happiness

I like to be happy.
When I'm happy, I feel good inside.
Happiness makes me feel that I've done something right.
Happiness makes me laugh and enjoy the things I do.
Happiness can take away pain and sadness.
Happiness can make a loved one's sadness turn into happiness.
I'm so happy when my loved ones are happy.
There is no pain in happiness.

-- Bart Rethmeier (dedicated to his wife)

Santa's Wife a Missing

'Twas Christmas day and all through the land
"My wife is a missing!" Santa exclaimed as he ran.
The reindeer came home. My sleigh is a fright.
Not a toy to be seen on this cold arctic night.
You see I was too sick on Christmas Eve Night,
So my wife did my job this past Christmas Night.
So off I go, to retrace her steps to learn of her plight
With hopes of her return from this ill-fated flight.

Over rooftops and mountains, Santa did roar.
Down drain spouts and chimneys, through back yards galore.
To Cleveland, he went to check every door.
Then he hit Painesville -- need I say more?
Then I heard Santa loudly proclaim, "I am not leaving 'til I check every house,
For someone out there knows of my spouse."
The children were screaming with cheers of delight.
"Mom, I see Santa! Oh, isn't he a sight!"

A little girl he spied. She knew of his plight.
"Santa," she said, "may I tell you of your wife and of last night?"
As Santa looked down at the little girl's poor face, there was a tear.
A mouse did appear with squeaks of good cheer.
The little girl scooped up the tiny church mouse,
"Here is a cracker for you and your spouse."
The mouse then quickly scampered away.
For he did not want to be the cat's Christmas dinner that day.

Then the little girl spoke of Christmas Eve Night.
"Mrs. Claus did not have an ill-fated flight.
To Australia she went this bright Christmas day.
Your wife ran off with my Aunt May!"
As the look of dread left Santa's face,

He scooped up the girl in a giant embrace.
"You'll not be poor, not one more day.
A higher education will change your way."

Santa was off leaving behind him the promise that he had made,
There would be enough money for the little girl's coldest of days.
To Australia, he went. Down under I hear.
To check all the cities and small little towns, so I hear.
Santa looked sad, as he slowly sat down.
"I've checked every city and every small town.
I've even checked the sheep farms, not once but twice.
There is not even a trace of my loving wife."

As Santa slowly rose up, a loud crowd he did hear.
"Could it be my wife? Who's singing?" He did hear.
As he looked around Don's Bar he did spy.
"Could it really be the apple of my eye?"
As he stepped inside the hall,
His wife is the party; she's the belle of the ball!
As he stood there with a frown on his face,
Quiet took over the entire place.

"Santa," said she, "you got my note.
Along with the map and directions I wrote."
"What," said Santa, "a note that you wrote?
There was not even a scrap of paper. Not even a word to be spoke."
"Santa," she said, "it's on the computer.
E-mail is flashing, or can't you read? Do you need a tutor?"
On that sour note, Santa looked down.
In a little boy's voice, he said with a frown.

"I am sorry on the computer I forgot to look.
A little girl told me where to look."
On that note, the band began to play.

The party rolled on until the next day.
Santa said he, "It is time to go.
For I can't dance and I might stub my toe!
The music was great, the food out of sight.
May we meet again on a Christmas night."

With good-byes all said, Santa and wife in a loving embrace,
She asked him, "Why the long face?
Our party is just getting started." Disappearing from sight, I heard Santa say.
"Ho! Ho! Ho! Up, up and away. With you at my side it's Christmas every day."
In a loving embrace with a warm tender kiss,
Santa did say, "Merry Christmas to all and to all a good day."

-- Karen Safewright

I Was

A whore
A thief
A liar
Abusive
A sinner
Manipulative
Ignorant
Abused
Skinny

I Am

Sober
A child of good
Blessed
A mother
Free
A sister
A friend
Respectful
Healthy
Me!!

-- Michelle Spencer

Fighting

Some fight to get along…
Some fight for freedom…
Some fight for peace…
Some fight for their faith…
Some fight to live…
Some fights are worth fighting for…

Me, I'm tired of all the fighting:
The kicking, biting, hitting, and the name-calling.
What in the Hell am I fighting for?

If I'm not fighting for a good cause, why am I fighting?

I'm not going to stop fighting because now I have something worth fighting for.
I'm going to have to fight for my freedom…
I'm going to have to fight for the right to be with my children.

I'm going to fight. I cannot give up.
Some things are worth fighting for.
My children, my freedom, and the right to live in peace.

-- Cicely Mason

Angel of the Lake

Dear Peter,

I know you will be truly surprised in receiving this letter. It has been several years, and we always had an uneasy sense of communication. From that day we met, both seeking summer jobs at the Island House, I knew it would be difficult for me to let go at season's end. Who knows, maybe there were higher forces at work. What caused us both to quit good jobs and head to the lake that summer? It seemed, at that particular point in time, we were both taking unusual directions in our lives.

I still recall that day when you so boldly told me that if I stepped your way, you would take me to the heavens. I realized it was a special time in our lives. Besides being together, we both found, if only for a brief summer, a total peace within ourselves. I so fondly remember those warm moonlit nights on the lake as we used Otto's boat to sail to the Island. How majestically we waltzed under the stars together at the Colonial. How we always savored that last dance of the night, staying later each night hoping to catch the late breeze back to Port Clinton. Navigating only by shadows, with the wind racing through my hair, I will never forget the tranquillity that overcame me. A sensation I had not felt before.

That summer I fell in love twice, once with you and once with the lake. It was a time and place that engulfed us into rapture. Those lazy Sunday afternoons we spent at Sandy Beach. Lying in the warm sun, reading paperbacks, we fell asleep in each other's arms only to be awakened hours later by the cry of the gulls. The late afternoon sun danced on the breakers. As autumn leaves began to appear, we both knew it would be difficult to accept the end of summer as real. It was as though the lake would not release us. Yet somehow, we both sensed a life together was always just beyond our grasp.

There is something I must share with you. If you are reading this letter, it is because I lost my fight against a disease known as spinal meningitis. I tried but I could do no more. Understanding why truly eludes me. Several months ago, the doctors told me it was a path I would be taking. I have tried to close my mind against the inevitable. Before goodbye is said, I must comfort my mind. The summer we shared I now realize has rewarded me with the necessity of my existence. I would now like to introduce you to Ashley, a child as beautiful as heaven could devise who will steal your heart as she stole mine. She is the love we orchestrated that summer. Now three years old, I refer to her as my "Angel of the Lake." She has your moods and my emotions.

Attempting to consider all of my future unknowns, I want you to know that the love I felt for you has never left me. Even as the summer we spent together still stirs within my soul, the angels stand vigil over me. I spend my final days wandering in a place I can only visit in my mind. Please, in the greatest depths of your faith, hold my promise that you will always remember I lived; forget I died.

Love, Laura

P.S. If you should ever return to the lake, this is where you will find me.

The above letter and a photo were left aboard the "Erie Isle" on a late night return trip from Put-in-Bay in the summer of 1936. It was never claimed.

-- Phil Edwards

Drifting

I can't tell
What you're thinking.
But I can feel
Our hearts unlinking.

The warmth you filled my
Heart with
When I was feeling cold,
Is no longer inside of me
And things
Are getting old.

I wish you'd loved me as I
Love you.
But now it is too late
To offer a solution
For our hearts are filled
With hate.

A part of me is dying,
The part that loved you.
But it will
Be reborn again
When I
Find someone new.

Love was
What it was about,
But now it's disappeared.
Remember all
The fun we had;
Forget the pain and tears.

For sometime
In the future
When I see
You once again,
I will think of all the
Things we shared
And how
I loved you then.

-- Tiffney McNicol

Maybe Tomorrow I'll Find What I'm After (A Man In Search of A Love)

I was young, but now I'm old.
Only half my story has ever been told.
I remember my childhood. I loved this girl
who in many ways rocked my world.
My dream is to find that four leaf clover,
to bear the pain while I pass over.
I asked all the stars in heaven above,
which is the way to my true love?
Through all the suffering, pain, and laughter
maybe tomorrow I'll find what I'm after.

-- Lonnie Littleton

Tranquility Corner

There is a place in my home that I have made my "me space." I call it Tranquility Corner. The change was gradual but now is complete. The once bouncy, noisy television audience is on the other side of the room. The traffic from bedrooms, bathroom, and kitchen are all on that side of the house. A huge stone fireplace splits the room, which has given me the privilege of making this once populated corner my very own.

I plop down on my old loveseat-sized sofa. My crochet-looped blankets, sweaters, and pillows are always there to cuddle under and sleep if I choose, or I just sit and look around at my things that surround me. On the back of the sofa sits my stuffed doll; a teddy bear, which, when hugged, vibrates with a comforting heartbeat; Rudolph, whose nose lights up and mouth moves as he sings "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"; and Taz, whose tongue spins as he gurgles.

In front of me stands the table I made myself. Under it is a rocking horse, and on top are musical carousels that turn while they play a time. On that table, propped up against the wall, is a picture of three little boys leaning against a solid wooden fence with such carefree attitudes that I had to have it as soon as I saw it. It reminds me of my three boys when they were younger. All three wear caps and have rolled-up pant legs. Each one has just flipped a coin and is holding it to the back of his hand, waiting to see who will reveal his heads or tails first. Above this picture on the wall hang red shelves that hold little angels from my collection. A group picture of all five of my children sits there beside a round framed picture plate with a litter of collie pups playing in what once was a basketful of carefully wound yarn. Each pup wears a red kerchief around its neck, and their joy is evident by their perky ears, airborne tails, and the twinkle in their eyes. Next to that cheerful scene is a picture of a little girl standing in the center, her forehead resting against her arm as she leans on the wall. Her baby-doll is on the floor, dropped from her limp hand.

Behind her stands her loyal collie. He stands uncertain, with one paw slightly raised, his face turned looking towards the person who has put them in the corner. I can almost hear him asking, "What did we do wrong?"

To my right against the brick wall stand wooden shelves that hold the books I've read and our VCR tapes. On the top of these shelves is a beautiful all-glass carousel my son, Billy, gave to me last year for Christmas. Six horses, each a different color, hang from hooks under the awning. The hooks match the color of the horse suspended from them. I have two lighted figurines that I leave out all year long. They are Christmas decorations, but the soft glow that comes from Mary, baby Jesus, and the angel are soothing to me. Leaning against the wall stands a picture my mother gave to me. A pink border surrounds a young girl with long blond hair. She wears a blue printed dress with a modest lace bib under her chin. I don't have to see it, but I know there is a big bow tied at the small of her back. She sits on a faded rose sofa edged with wooden arches. She is holding an open book with both hands resting on her knees. A pink ribbon bookmark dangles from the book's crease. An oval frame picture that has to be a portrait of her grandmother smiles down at her from the wall behind the sofa. She is so content and peaceful reading from her book. My mother had this picture for years before giving it to me. She never told me this, my sister did, but Mom says the picture reminds her of me. I'll keep it forever.

I write this sitting at the kitchen table. I keep glancing up to stare longingly toward my corner. I'm ending my long day of house cleaning, chauffeuring, cooking, baking, and washing dishes. When did they promote me to head dishwasher? Within the next few minutes, I shall be in the place that gives me the peace and comfort I so rightfully deserve. Tranquility Corner, here I come!

-- Pam Fiore

Always on My Mind

When you stand looking at the sky of blue,
Think of me, looking at that same sky too.

Even though we are miles apart,
We'll always be together in our hearts.

I don't get to see you as often as I'd like,
But I think about you in the stillness of the night.

You are my sister and my best friend,
And you're always there to lend a hand.

When I'm unhappy, sad, or alone,
You are always there to help me along.

When I see a flower, I think of you.
Its radiance and beauty are so much like you.

So sister of mine, so gentle and kind,
Remember I love you and you're always on my mind.

-- Mary L. Garrison
This is dedicated to my sister Judy,
who lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Died for Love

At a park where I dwell, I met a boy I loved so well.
He came and stole my heart from me.
Now this boy hath set me free.
He sat a strange girl on his knee
and told her things he'd never told me.
Now I know the reason why—
because this girl was much prettier than I.
I ran straight home to my bed.
To another not a word I said.
My father came home late that night
and searched for me from left to right.
Then to my door in which he broke,
only to find me hanging from a rope.
He says," Oh, daughter dear, what have you done?
You've killed yourself for another man's son."
With a knife he cut me down,
and on the dresser a note he found.
"Dig a grave, dig it deep,
marble stone from head to feet,
On this grave please place a dove,
to show the world I died for love."

-- Tavia Lorenzoni

Reminiscences

My Old Kentucky Home

When I was a boy, I lived in a big old log house in the mountains in Kentucky. It sat on 1500 acres two miles out of Paintsville, Kentucky. It had six big rooms. It used to be a boarding house for coal miners and farm workers. Each room went out to the porch, so when we wanted to visit with each other, we had to go outside on the porch. Sometimes it was really cold!

It had six big open fireplaces, one in every room. It had two stone chimneys built at each end of the house. We didn't build any fires at night, so we kept warm by piling on blankets and quilts. It was hard getting by in the winter.

We had three big barns, one for hay and cattle, one for the two horses and the two milk cows, and one which we hung tobacco in. We had three open dug wells. Our two horses, Jack and Jule, pulled the wagon and the farm machinery. We managed to have a car to go to church on Sunday. It was a '37 Plymouth. The old truck was used for hauling coal and tobacco from the field. It was an old '39 Chevrolet flat bed truck. We also used it to go up in the mountains to get our winter's coal out of the abandoned coal mine.

When I look at pictures of the old house and barn, I feel like I'm missing something.

-- Glen A. Baldwin

City of Excitement

In southeastern Europe, in the heart of the Balkans, Beograd spreads its hand to everybody; Beograd offers its heart to everybody; Beograd opens its door to everybody.

Many famous authors have written books about this miraculous city. Many songs are devoted to Beograd. Beograd lies in Avala's shade. Through its veins flow two rivers, the Sava and the Danube. Beograd has a soul and a heart. Knez Mihajla Street gives magical power to this beautiful city. This street is an art, culture, and fashion stage. Also, it is the most popular promenade in the country. In its cafes and restaurants begin many loves and many businesses.

Skadarlija and Kalimegdan are the oldest parts of Beograd. Both are beautiful and very interesting—Kalimegdan with its old towers and Skadarlija with its specific edifices. Newly built glass buildings make a contrast to old historical monuments. Many museums and theaters make Beograd's life more interesting.

Only Beograd lives twenty-five hours a day!

-- Dragana Stevic

Reaching My Goals With God's Help

I never dreamed that I could be where I am today being successful, attending the LEARN GED program at the YWCA in Cincinnati, Ohio.

I was born in 1927 way out in the country on a farm. In my childhood we were very poor. There was one tragedy after another in my family. I lost my mother at age twelve. A year later I lost my sister Catherine because of a burst appendix. The next year my younger sister Viola (age nine) and I (age fourteen) were the only survivors of a fire that destroyed our home.

Viola and I had to live with separate relatives. The relatives that I lived with lived in a very small and isolated log cabin by the creek. When it rained there was only a narrow broken-down bridge to walk over. In the rain I had to cross this bridge alone and cut through the wet fields to catch the school bus. Then I had wet feet all day.

The people that I lived with were very cruel. They abused me by yelling, "You're no good for anything!" I didn't have any opportunities or privileges that I needed in my teen years. They also opened the door to incest, and I was used as a slave. I felt very alone and afraid. Although I was not "in hiding" as Anne Frank was, I felt many of the same emotions that she did.

At age 22 I made a decision to save my life. I decided to board at a place for single working women. There I felt safe and had peace of mind.

In my life I did all kinds of work in factories, stores, stock rooms, and nursing homes. I also cared for the elderly in their own homes. I was a bus girl in cafeterias and helped the customers with their trays. I am not working now, but I enjoy volunteering. The last place that I volunteered was in the library in a church. Even though I had never done this type of work, I learned a lot and gained confidence in myself.

In January 1998, I learned that the YWCA had a LEARN GED program. I took the test and was accepted for the classes. I was hesitant to begin and thought that I would not be able to change my lifestyle by being there regularly, but I'm grateful that I met such caring people who have helped me and wanted the very best for my future. Above all, I know that I have improved in reading, writing, and spelling. Now I'm thankful that God has opened this door.

-- M. Foltz

Ramadan

Ramadan for Muslims is the time of year we dedicate to fasting, praying, and becoming one with Allah (God) and our family. This is also the time we refrain from things that are not peaceful or that will take you from a spiritual state of mind.

Ramadan takes place in the month of December and goes through the New Year. This month is chosen because December is when Prophet Muhammad (peace is upon him) received the first of the Quran revelations. It is also the time of year that brings the highest suicide rate, the most debt is accumulated, the time that the most alcohol and drugs are consumed and people are most stressed.

The adults fast from sun up to sun down as a sacrifice to God for the year of blessings. We read the Holy Quran every day to our children and ask them questions about what they're thankful for. We refrain from foul language, arguing, and spanking during this holy month. We make five mandatory prayers daily.

Ramadan has added so much to my life. I am so happy that my children are being taught that no material things such as gifts or a pretty tree can compare to the blessings of life, health, and strength that Allah (God) has given us to take us into the New Year. We end the month with a feast and celebration. Families come together in praise and humility to reflect on God's true mercy and divine guidance.

Happy New Year and God Bless

-- Traci Cornist

What a Day!

I'd just gotten home from a two-week stay in the hospital and wasn't feeling all that perky, but I decided to go ahead and have the family Thanksgiving dinner as we'd had for years. I phoned my two daughters, and they agreed to let me do it if they could bring something for the meal.

The day before the "big day" I made the traditional pumpkin pies and a black raspberry pie, which the girls were especially fond of. The homemade noodles were laid to dry overnight on a sheet of wax paper.

The "big day" arrived, and I got up early to get things done before the family started trickling in. It wasn't long before tantalizing aromas wafted throughout the house. The family started coming, and by one-thirty all were here. It was the usual chitchat and small talk.

It was soon time to get the turkey out of the oven when, you guessed it, the oven control was still on "preheat!" I was so embarrassed! And the teasing never stopped all the rest of the day. But a transformation seemed to take place. The card table was taken from the press, a deck of cards seemed to appear as if by magic, and a game of euchre was started. Knick-knacks were removed from the coffee table and the little ones got out Candy Land, a deck of Crazy Eights, and even Old Maid. But most of all, the conversation flowed like sweet wine. In no time at all, the turkey was ready. As I sat down at the table, I couldn't help but think of an artist's palette with the orange of the candied yams, the green of the green beans, the white of the fluffy mashed potatoes, the burgundy-red of the cranberry sauce, and all the different colors.

Even today, when I have a family dinner, I notice Mike, a son-in-law, always glances at the oven setting. It was one day I'll always remember.

-- Helen Wiggins

Impressions

I've been in the United States for one year. The first time in a new country is the most difficult time for immigrants. But, step by step, everybody overcomes this period and builds a new life. The same has happened with me during this year. I got my driving license (my husband and father-in-law spent a lot of their spare time teaching me how to drive a car); I began to work; my son went to kindergarten. Every one of these events was very joyful, exciting, and new for me. All of them let me understand more about America, to learn something new. But nothing can compare with two different impressions that I had this summer and in the beginning of September. And I'd like to share them with you.

The first one is about our trip to Russia. We went there to visit my family. Anxious things happened during this year in my country. All our American friends and my husband's relatives tried to dissuade us from going to Russia. But my husband made the decision in spite of everything. "We must go because you miss your country and your family so much." Yes, that was the truth. I really missed my homeland. It is a beautiful country with friendly and hospitable people. For two weeks I was so happy. I could understand every single word; I could speak without thinking about mistakes and grammar. I met relatives and friends. I was happy to tell them how my life had changed since I came to America. I think everybody understands those feelings, when you go back to your native land after a long time of absence. Every small thing becomes so important to you and makes you so happy.

My second impression was a trip inside America to Virginia Beach. That was my dream – to see the ocean. In September it came true. The season was finishing when we got there, so there weren't too many people on the streets or on the beach. We arrived in the evening at our hotel. I was waiting all day and like a child I asked my husband all the time on the way to this place, "How far is it? Where is the

ocean?" You can't see it until the very last moment. During the time when we filled out our papers in the hotel I still couldn't see the water, but you can feel something huge, vivid, alive, and incomprehensible. It fascinates, makes you wait for something, and finally it comes. After a while we went to our room. The blinds were closed. My husband opened them, and the greatest view of the ocean stopped all my words and feelings – only the delight which was growing with understanding that it is something inexplicable and beautiful, excellent, and you are next to this. The water wasn't quiet. High waves came and went. The ocean was breathing. I felt that I had touched the eternity of ages.

The nature in American has given me a lot of good feelings. I enjoy the really beautiful pictures, but the ocean is the strongest one for me.

-- Natalya A. Stare

Years Ago

I wonder what it would be like
Living years ago.
Using horses, pulling plows
To ready fields to sow.

The work of pulling endless weeds
And hoeing in the sun.
To reap the fruits of harvest
When the work is done.

Drawing water from the well
To do the daily chores.
Bathing, washing, cooking,
And scrubbing dirty floors.

Hunting, fishing, chopping wood,
The work was never done.
Mending, sewing, baking,
For each and everyone.

I wonder what it would be like
Living years ago.
They worked and toiled from dusk to dawn,
How hard I'll never know.

-- Carol Rudder

Sharecropping

I was born in Abbeyville, Georgia. I was raised on a farm, without a father. I was my mother's sole means of survival. In the state of Georgia you didn't start school until the age of six. And I was taken out of school at the age of seven. I had to work – I helped as a man – in a man's place from the age of seven. This is why I go to school now. I am trying to learn to read and write better.

I moved to Cleveland, Ohio, in 1956. I got a job my second day in Cleveland, as a truck driver. I drove a truck for 18 years. I couldn't read addresses, so I would take the first two letters of the address – names of the companies – and I would compare the name of the company with the name on the bill. I couldn't read it, but I could compare letters.

And I had to stop in restaurants, truck stops, and eat. I couldn't read the menu, so I would always order hamburgers. When I got tired of eating hamburgers, I would jive the waitress, "What do you have today that you would like?" "Oh, we have smothered liver and onions, we have steak and mashed potatoes, we have chicken with two side dishes of vegetables." So, after naming what she would like to eat from the menu, I would order what I thought I would like, besides hamburgers!

So now, as of today, I'm a student at Project: Learn. I am proud to be a student here. I enjoy coming to Project:LEARN.

-- Harold Lester

Finding the Right Home

It was December 1996, and I was visiting Mrs. Washington, a gentle lady and new neighbor who lived on the next street. She wanted to give me a present for picking her up for a class at church. She invited me to sit as she apologized for the cat hair. Trying not to notice the smell, I said, "Oh! That's OK." There were cats climbing and jumping on the furniture, rubbing against my leg, and wanting to play. I inquired about the one with the limp, and Mrs. Washington started to tell me her story.

It was late in the evening on a very cold day. I heard a thump at the side door, looked out, but didn't see anything or anyone. But for some reason I opened the door anyway. Looking down I saw a cat looking up at me. I pushed open the screen and asked, "What are you doing here?" The cat ran inside and went straight to the basement. While I stood there in surprise, the cat came back up the steps and out the door. I laughed to myself and went back to what I was doing. It was about 12:00 p.m. or after when there was another thump at the door. I opened it and the cat came in with something in her mouth. It was a kitten. She headed for the basement, and a few minutes later she was back at the door. Well, she continued her going and coming until there were three kittens inside. By now it was very late, and she stayed with them for a while. My guess was she was feeding them. Sometime before daylight, she made a noise to let me know she was ready to leave. I got up and opened the door, and off she went. Come morning I went to check on the kittens. Well, I tell you, that cat had found a soft, warm spot for her kittens.

Two days passed, and the cat had not returned. The cat was found dead two houses from my sister, who lives about a block and a half down the street. The house

was empty, and it seems the family had recently moved away leaving the cat behind. I later saw that the smallest kitten had a limp. It had probably happened when the mama cat was dragging it through the snow. My family complains about the smell and thinks I should get rid of them. But I can't because the cat brought them to me. So, that's how I got these cats.

Spoken with such compassion, you would think Mrs. Washington was talking about children instead of cats. "That's a wonderful story," I said. "Thank you for sharing it with me." We could all learn from that story. Love like that is missing from motherhood of the '90s. Lately, too many mothers are abandoning and abusing their children.

"Mrs. Washington, yours is probably the only kind voice the cat heard as she made her way up the street. Kindness is something all God's creatures can understand."

"Yes," she said in agreement.

There were more than 25 houses the cat passed up before coming to your door. But she did not give up her search, sensing she would not survive much longer. I'm reminded of how Jesus compared a mother's love to that of our Heavenly Father for us. Not equal to, but the closest we'll see.

Mrs. Washington is no longer with us. She died in 1998. But I will tell her story of the cat as often as I can to remind us of a mother's responsibility.

-- Annie Bell

The Best Christmas Ever

The best Christmas I can remember was in 1990. The log house, the real Christmas tree, and all the home-cooked meals made it special.

My husband and I decided to go to the country for Christmas. We stayed in my mother's log house in Kentucky. We had to cut wood to heat the old log house; and, believe me, you will remember to get up in the middle of the night to put wood in the fireplace. If you don't, you will freeze to death.

The Christmas tree is a big deal down in the country. You cut your tree down yourself because Christmas trees are on the farmland everywhere. That is so neat -- to cut down a real Christmas tree, bring the tree inside, and make your own decorations. That means you don't have to drive all over town looking for that special tree. Instead, you walk the land until you find that special tree.

The cooking was all home-cooked meals. I loved getting up early and fixing homemade bread. All I can tell you is you'd better know how to cook because there is no fast food.

Times have changed so much. I wish my children knew what it was like to live in a log house, go out to cut your own fresh Christmas tree from the land you live on, and cook your meals at home. Maybe someday they will.

-- Martha H. Brinker

Going Fishing with Uncle Leo

"If heaven isn't on the lake, I'm not going!" This was just one of Uncle Leo's many famous quotations. His wisdom and experience went to the outer fringes of his imagination and always put me in awe and envy. Opening my scrapbook releases a flood of memories of summer fishing trips with Uncle Leo. Uncle Leo, my father's older brother, was an ancient mariner who treasured life on the lake.

It was an odd thing, but Uncle Leo and my mother didn't get along very well at all. Mom referred to him as a crusty old sea dog that suffered with bottle fatigue. My dad would come to Uncle Leo's defense stating he was only trying to escape an unhappy past. Then Mom's vocabulary would leapfrog into action. One of her favorites was "for crying out loud, his entire lifestyle has been boozen and snoozen." I think this may have all started with my father having to pay for Uncle Leo's last two divorces. Mom said that he should be totally ashamed and covered in embarrassment for being in a constant state of no income and that he had all the speed of an arthritic snail when it came to paying back my father.

Actually, Uncle Leo lived off the income of a small, old insurance claim that he had been awarded. Mom said that his attorney, Perry Loophole, was only missing an eye patch and a parrot and would steal a dead fly from a blind spider. Mom often referred to Uncle Leo as a park bench lunatic who was a tycoon in the art of leisure. Normally, we kids would be sent from the room whenever his name came up. I guess he had a habit of leading a path that meandered slightly off course, which often stirred up quite a commotion in the family. He embraced the notions of smoking and chewing tobacco and loved to drink what he referred to as Vodka soda. He said it provided him with inspiration. Myself, I really don't think he was a threat to society as mom often indicated.

Uncle Leo was not one to hold a grudge. Even though at times he thought mom had the disposition of an untipped waitress, I know he loved her anyway.

He always looked kind of old. I wasn't sure of his exact age, but I know he had been in W.W.I (you know, the war to end all wars).

He often held us kids spellbound with his stories of trench warfare in France and how he had been one of the first Americans over the top. Mom said someone had pushed him.

Each summer as soon as school was out, Uncle Leo would drive up to get me and take me to his island for a week of fishing and camping. Around March, I would find myself already waiting for our unpredictable adventure of summer to begin. It was still early in the '50s, a time when boats were still made of wood, and Uncle Leo's had been lost in a time warp somewhere. He referred to it as his "dream missile." Actually, it was an old canoe. He took it with him just about every place he went. He had this old car he had converted into a pick-up truck. When he would come to pick me up, I could see the smoke from the engine long before I could see him and his "missile hauler." Mom called it his "Spanky and Buckwheat" contraption.

Getting to his island was half the fun. We would ride in the "missile hauler" for at least two hours; then, we would load all the beer gear into the canoe for the crossing to his island. Just the sheer pleasure of spending time with Uncle Leo on his Fishing Paradise was better than being anywhere else. Uncle Leo's fishing skills were legendary and his tactics near mystical. Mom said he didn't know zip about fishing and probably didn't even have a license. But he showed me the creative process of baiting the hook the proper way and said he had minnows in his bloodstream. All of his fishing equipment was brand new (just 20 years ago). We were fishing detectives. Each evening around the campfire, we would just talk and enjoy a good cigar. Uncle Leo could fish, eat sardines, and drink beer, all while never having to leave his hammock. He would tell me things I would need to know later in life, like "phase one" was to dream. "Phase two" was not to procrastinate about phase one and things like that.

He told me of his plans to turn the island into a monkey farm someday and about all the money he would make by selling them to the circus; then, he would be able to finally pay back my dad. And how when he was a child, Grandma would make him eat everything on his plate because millions of people were starving in China. Now, because of those starving people in China, he said he could no longer appear in public in a swimsuit. With so many fish and so many stories, as in the blink of an eye, our week would fly by. Returning home, Mom would always be waiting for us. I knew that look. She always started with "here comes Blackbeard with his student back from the avoid-work hideout." Our fishing trips were always a voyage I enjoyed immensely and would not soon forget.

Of course, that was many years ago. I can still picture Uncle Leo swaying in the breeze in his island hammock. Today, I often think about those days of the past, and his voice is still in my mind. As we boarded the canoe, he would say with his colorful speech, "This is where the dreams begin." Then I can dimly recall my mother saying, "He had waited so long for his ship to come in that his pier collapsed."

As for me, I never let on that I knew the island sitting on the edge of the lake was Mouse Island. To me it always was and always will be Uncle Leo's "Shangri-La."

-- Phil Edwards

Christmas in Ukraine

Following the harvest and after all the work in the fields has been completed comes the holiday season. Now people rest from work and take time to visit with one another. This helps strengthen family ties. They are thankful for all of their family possessions, which are their riches. Life is simple and pleasant in Ukrainian villages. The holiday celebration begins in December with the Feast of St. Nicholas and goes through January with the celebration of the birth of Christ and then the Epiphany.

The favorite holiday for children is St. Nicholas Day, which falls on December 19. The children want to be well behaved. They listen to their parents and other adults because they are afraid that St. Nicholas will not bring them gifts. St. Nicholas always brings delicious candy, cookies, and fruits. Children who are especially good also receive a story. St. Nicholas travels from house to house and leaves gifts under the children's pillows. Children always try to wait for St. Nicholas by not falling asleep. Some are lucky enough to get a glimpse of him. Those who do fall asleep are not that disappointed because they are still rewarded with a gift.

Finally Christmas Eve comes. Ukraine has a lot of beautiful old traditions that have been handed down from generation to generation. It seems like every city, every town, every village has something different.

We put up the Christmas tree right before the Holy Supper. Usually the tree comes from the nearest forest. Children decorate the tree while Mother and Grandmother prepare the meal. This evening, all the food must be meatless. Christmas Eve is a strict fast day. There will be twelve different foods just like there were twelve apostles. When the children have finished decorating the tree, Father and Grandfather bring sheaths of wheat. They make a greeting to the family, "I wish you all joy at this Holy Supper with the Birth of Christ from now until Easter, and from Easter to next Christmas and for hundreds of years more." Then they cover

the straw on the table with a tablecloth. Women place the meal on the table, light one candle in the middle of the table, and all kneel down to pray. Then all sit down to eat.

The first thing you must eat is the consecrated bread. Grandfather throws a spoonful of kutya (wheat) on the ceiling to see if it sticks. This is a tradition that tries to predict how next year's crops will be. If the kutya sticks to the ceiling, next year's harvest will be plentiful.

Everyone tries to return home to celebrate this Holy Supper with the family. If someone can't come home for the holidays, an empty place setting and a chair are put out as a reminder. Carolers go from house to house, singing beautiful Ukrainian Christmas songs. No one sleeps that night. Carolers call at everyone's home. No food is wasted. After supper all the dishes are left on the table for the remembrance of deceased family members, and no work is performed. After Christmas Eve we celebrate Christmas for three more days.

It makes me feel so warm inside to share with you all those memories. I wish all of you the best and hope you have a nice holiday season.

-- Zenia Kovalska

Hair Day

My mother was born on a farm in a place called Stamper's Fork. She grew up during the Depression years. They didn't have any electricity or inside plumbing in that area of the country. Times were hard for almost everyone at that time.

Mom had five brothers and four sisters (one died shortly after being born). They all worked very hard as they mostly lived off the land. They had to get up at the crack of dawn to do the chores. The girls made breakfast and the boys fed the livestock and milked the cows. Sometimes the girls helped with those chores too. The boys worked in the fields with Pap, and after the household chores were done, the girls also helped in the fields.

I always loved to hear the stories my mom told of her growing-up years. When she was around fifteen years old, she went to work sewing clothes at the National Youth Administration (NYA) to help out with finances for the family. The NYA was funded by the government to keep young men and women off home relief and either train them in job skills or help them stay in school.

Her parents, Mammy and Pap, were very religious, very strict, and didn't believe in women cutting their hair. After Mom had worked at this place for over a year, she felt like she was old enough to make some of her own decisions, like for one, cutting her hair. Her hair was really long and naturally wavy; it had never been cut. A lot of the other young girls working with her had their hair cut short and permed, so she decided she would do the same. She knew Mammy wouldn't agree for her to get hair cut, so she told Mammy she wanted to spend the night with her older sister who had gotten married and moved close to town. Mom caught the evening train to her sister's house. She enjoyed riding the train; it was one of her favorite things to do.

The next morning Mom and her sister went to the beauty shop, and Mom got her hair cut and permed. It turned

out really short and very, very curly since it had some natural wave in it.

All the way home Mom dreaded facing Mammy, and the train ride was not as enjoyable as it had been the evening before.

Mammy was on the porch when Mom got there. She took one look at Mom and started crying. Mammy said, "You throwed away all my work." Mammy just kept crying because she felt like Mom's hair was her handiwork, as she loved to comb and fix it.

Mom's grandpa was sitting in a chair on the porch. He only had one leg because the other one was cut off just below the knee and he couldn't walk. Pap was up in the field, and he hollered down to Grandpa and wanted to know what in tarnation was going on down there. Grandpa hollered back, "Marthie's come home and done something to her hair and Sallie is cutting up."

Anyway, Pap wanted some water brought up, so Mammy made Mom take him a bucket of water. Mom put a straw hat on her head so Pap wouldn't see her hair, but just as she got to him a puff of wind blew off her straw hat. Pap just looked at her and started laughing. "You look like a little foggy-headed ewe peeping through a brush pile." That was all he ever had to say about it.

Mom didn't realize it would hurt her mother so much or she would have never gotten her hair cut and permed. Of course, Mammy got over it.

-- Norma J. King

Cherry Tobacco

When I was younger, I would beg my parents to take me to my favorite place --- Vinton Co., McArthur, Ohio. I would spend my entire summer vacation there with my loving Aunt Martha, caring Uncle John, and their ten courageous children. They made me feel special, loved, and part of their enormous family.

I spent most of my time outside helping with chores. I would help gather chicken eggs. An old yellow school bus was used for a chicken coop. The first step through its door took my breath away. There was an unexpected strong odor of ammonia from the chicken droppings. I hurriedly gathered the lukewarm eggs and put them into a well-used straw basket. A faraway rooster crowed announcing feeding time. Dirt danced in the single ray of sunlight that shot through the broken pane of the only window that hadn't been painted black. A tree branch scraped the outside of the bus, creating the sound of fingernails running across a chalkboard. The teeth-grinding sound echoed into the bus and gave me goosebumps.

Another chore I learned to enjoy was milking their goat every morning just at dawn. The clean, crisp morning air tingled my skin, and I inhaled big gulps of it. Old Nanny chewed her grass patiently while she waited for her portion of grain. Dewy grass moistened the corners of her mouth when she darted her long, hot-pink tongue out, and a cloud of smoky moisture came from her grey nostrils. My cousin Brenda fed the friendly nanny goat straight from a feeder pouch as I milked her, so that she couldn't bite me. The beast nuzzled into me as I emptied her swollen udder. The goat's skin was hot and smooth. The spray of creamy white milk came flowing into my pail.

I passed up the opportunity to feed the smelly, fat pigs with flies on their noses, pink curly tails, and hogs wash on their backs. Instead I helped Aunt Martha gather wood and coal for the old pot-bellied cook stove to get it hot and ready

for cooking our supper. They also used it for heating. I loved the smell of the wood and the coal with a hint of freshly brewed coffee mingled in. Uncle John's cherry pipe tobacco added an even more special aroma to the large, old house.

I went to bed early and listened to the sounds surrounding my adventurous world. A log crackled in the cozy wood stove. From a distance a whippoorwill often sang to me in a poet's voice, and I would drift into a peaceful sleep.

Today the old house is no longer standing. In 1993, Uncle John died quietly in his sleep. 'The day before he died he shot two deer. He had always wanted to bag two deer in one day. I hope he got the big one that he had been hunting for so many years. Aunt Martha now lives at a nearby location in a mobile home. She still uses the same wood stove. When I go visit her I can still smell the wood smoke mixed with coffee and (can it be) the sweet aroma of cherry tobacco.

-- Christine Deal

Wildmen

Glistening gold, and whatever hues of the rainbow in proximity for it to reflect, it was truly beautiful. It was a tenor sax, propped up in a lovely, blue, velvet-lined case, and I couldn't take my eyes off it. Yeah sure there were plenty of other musical instruments for flutaphone alumni and their parents to rent or buy at this display. This, however, was the only tenor, and once I saw it, I would look at nothing else.

The salesman, distinguished looking in a suit, slicked- back white hair, moustache, and glasses, brought the sax gingerly out of the case. He adjusted a neckstrap on me (to support the sax), hooked me up, and let me play a few notes. The sax was almost as big as I. I had barely enough wind to play it, and my child's hands just stretched to cover the keys. No matter; this was it! The lower range on a tenor made for a wider range of parts you could play than on an alto sax. Besides that deeper, gutsier sound I had heard on radio just served to make the tenor more desirable.

"Why don't you try one of those altos or a clarinet? You're awfully small for that big thing." Mom spoke and burst my bubble. I was no longer John Coltrane, but a scrawny little kid.

"Aw Mom, everybody is going to have them! I can handle this, honest! I'll be too busy practicing to bug Grandma and Little Brother. Give me a chance, you'll see!" I was begging my ass off, but it was beg or bypass the tenor.

"Let the boy have the big one, eh? He's not a midget forever you know. He's got the wind, he's strong enough to lift it and carry it, so what's the problem?" Dad was taking my side. Excellent! We prevailed, and the tenor found a good home . . . ours.

I not only learned to play, but play pretty well. This was possible because of my friend Gary. He was a natural born musician, and everyone that played with him or around him got better. We'd take turns going to each other's houses (a few blocks apart) and play band music, lesson music,

Monopoly, radio, and records. It was really cool when Gary's dad broke out his big band music books and "blew the cobwebs out" of his tenor sax. We then had trios with one alto and two tenors. Needless to say, I packed my sax and music folder into my Radio Flyer wagon quite often to make the pilgrimage to Gary's house. Gary and I both stated at this point in time that we wanted to be band directors. He would follow through with his dream, while I would follow a lot of dead ends.

By junior high, Gary and I played sax, clarinet, oboe and bassoon and whatever else we could get our hands on. Gary had also put together an instrumental quartet. We played big band tunes, covers of Beatles, Dave Clark Five, Gary Lewis, Pet Clark, Wipeout, . . . etc. Our gigs were mostly dinners for local lodges and school dances. Our mothers got together so we always "looked nice" in our maroon blazers, gray slacks, and white turtlenecks. All the arrangements on the pop music were figured out and written out by hand from sheet music that Gary purchased at music stores. With the advent of guitar- driven bands with vocals, and high school, we kind of went our separate ways.

Marching band was fun too. Gary and I had started early (grade school) thanks to 4-H band. We went to every kind of parade, the state fair, and even sat in the grandstand to play between harness races at the county fair.

There was one sadistic irony that seemed to plague every marching band. Nearly all of them wore white shoes. Nearly all of them would be stuck behind the equestrian contingent of any and all parades. Ask any band mother about horseshit and white bucks.

High school marching band brought majorettes, summer practices, and band camp into play. On the bus trips my harmonica played along with whatever anyone felt like singing. It was also during this period the Wildmen came to be. Mostly sax players, a few trumpets, trombones and drums, we were devoted to mischief as much as music.

One example of the Wildmen in action was during my junior year. A couple of guys would lead me over to the opposing team's bleachers after halftime of the football games we played at. I wore dark glasses as they did also. I'd play a five-minute set on the harmonica, while they held their hats out (we were in band uniforms). We were doing pretty well with this, until the band director followed us on the sly one night. Once we cranked up, he put a detention slip in each of our band hats. Hell, I never said I was blind . . . near-sightedness ought to count for something!

School band sponsored all sorts of neat things through the years. Solo competitions, concert band and marching band competitions, . . . all involved coed music, travel, and fun. This wasn't enough for the Wildmen going into their senior year. They wanted a jazz band to play some of the big band, jazz, R & B, and rock music they grew up listening to and loving.

What our band director arranged was for us to spend our second semester study hall practicing for what he called a "lab band." Hell, we weren't retrievers or rats, why not a jazz band! To add insult to injury, his insipid saccharin selections of "musak" must have been spawned at the bottom of an elevator shaft.

The bright spot was that the director would leave for most of the period to go across the building and have a smoke in the teachers' lounge. The minute he was down the hall, whoever was on lookout yelled "Wayne Cochran and the C. C. Riders!" We would at once break into any one of our collective eclectic repertoire. We played, swung and bobbed our horns, cut up, . . . what we had wanted to do to begin with. When the director would return (which wasn't often) we would just say we were taking a break and resume the elevator etudes.

Our group included eleven Wildmen and one Rosa. She was a great trumpet player. She was a great arranger too. Between her and Gary, we always had something new and fun to try out.

When she had transferred mid-term to our school in her senior year, Rosa made sure she was in on every possible music activity (vocal and instrumental). This had been the impetus at first for her landing in the "lab band."

Rosa stood out appearance-wise to the wannabe fashionable and cool Wildmen. A walking anachronism, she wore long skirts, sweaters, and saddle shoes handed down from older sisters (she was one of 14 kids). Her black hair was pulled back in a bun. Her face was accented by a pair of butterfly glasses so thick, that when she stared into the sun, the magnifying effect caused smoke to come out of her ears. But with this in mind, deep down most of us knew we weren't exactly celebrity look-alikes, . . . and she could play!

Teenage boys in a group often joke around to the point of being obnoxious. Any heckling of Rosa got dismissed by her rapid-fire one-liners. I guess any girl growing up with eight brothers wouldn't be cowed by cutups. The first day she was with the group set the tone.

"Hey Rosie, are you in the wrong class this period?" Larry was snickering behind his trombone.

A Doc Severinsonesque riff on her trumpet got everyone's attention, and her reply kept it. "My name is not Rose, not Rosie, but ROSA, ROW-SAH! Would you like for me to call you Looser or Lumpy instead of Larry?"

We were having a good time with this group, as there was not a grade or real credit. Our bon temps were bombarded, however, by an announcement from our band director that we were entered in a contest a month away (a week before graduation). No sweat, except that the set list he gave us looked like selections from a doctor's office.

The director's last name was unpronounceable, as it contained more consonants than a scrabble game. Everyone "affectionately" called him Mr. Ed. That is everyone but the Wildmen, who addressed him thus more for his uncanny resemblance to the posterior of the equine TV star of the same name.

This sucked! We went on strike. It was our way or no way. It was our group, our reputations. We were seniors and either we got creative control or forget it! Mr. Ed capitulated resentfully, telling us if we did poorly in this competition, we would all get "F" for the last grading period in concert band. He clopped and snorted back to his stall where he pretty much stayed for the rest of the year.

Yeah! We did it, . . . but we spent the next few days bickering over which four songs to play for the contest. There was a whole gargantuan gamut of music that was really cool, but no set four tunes that turned everybody on. We were on the verge of descending into the nihilistic depths of deep shit.

"You guys want to hear my idea for a killer set?" Rosa chirped in during a lull in the rumblings. Her suggestion was met with silence and stares, as she continued. "We use Gary's arrangement for Brubeck's 'Take Five,' Gary and I both arrange Sam and Dave's 'Hold On' and James Brown's 'Cold Sweat,' and last we use my arrangement of this hot new Latin number."

Gary thought that would be fine, as the three tunes we knew had great horn parts. I cautioned, though, that the middle two selections might sound funny without vocals. "Who the hell is going to sing songs like that and make it work?" I worried.

"Me!" Rosa asserted. Her face quickly flushed the hue her name suggested from the resulting laughter and guffaws. As we quieted down, she defended "I've got the same range as most male singers, just an octave higher. I sing along with records and radio all the time. I sing in the choir, I sing in church, and I sing for pay at weddings, dances, and the like in Lorain."

Why not? We were gaining nothing by arguing. Besides, if Rosa and Gary put something together, the rest of us couldn't help but look good and sound even better.

The first time we got it together enough to add vocals, Rosa quelled any doubts we may have harbored about her singing Sam and Dave or James Brown. Her mousy

appearance was the antithesis of her pure, powerful voice. She had the thrust and force of Aretha Franklin or Janis Joplin, but with her own unique sense of sound, phrasing, and style.

We were rolling now. Maybe the contest wasn't ours for the taking, but like Frank Sinatra said, we were doing at it our way. We memorized our parts (like marching band). We practiced swinging (and spinning) our horns, and we even managed to learn a few dance steps. We were going to give it hell and enjoy ourselves to boot.

"My sisters, the twins are coming up from Miami for a visit. They've agreed to sing backup and dance for our last three songs." Rosa beamed one day as the contest drew even closer.

"That's nice," I said, not entirely sold on this newest twist. We figured the sound was the thing, but after all the work Rosa had put in, why not add backups? "Hey, that fourth song doesn't have vocals," I remembered.

"It will have, I wrote the song, and I'll have the lyrics in time," Rosa stated with confidence. She had led us to believe this was a Santana tune until now. The ploy worked. We loved this ballad that changed tempo and volume like a Camaro shifted gears and took turns. An original composition . . . what else did she have up her sleeve?

The time was at hand. All of the guys arrived at the mall where the contest was to take place. We were to go on last, but we were concerned that Rosa (usually early) wasn't there yet. Maybe we made her mad sending her the two dozen sweetheart roses earlier that day. We all signed the card and wrote in it "To Rosa, the greatest Wildman of us all! Knock 'em dead tonite!" Maybe we pissed her off.

"Hoo-Whee! Check out what's coming this way!" Frank (our drummer) said out of nowhere. It was easily the most beautiful girl in Lorain County. She had ebony shoulder-length hair slightly curled and pinned back on one side. The hair framed a lovely high-cheek-boned face that glided lithely along on a killer bod. She wore a western-style white shirt (with embroidered flowers), a black mini skirt (slit up one

side), and high-heeled cowboy boots. She moved like a jungle cat . . . Hot damn! She was coming our way. She walked right up to us, stopped and flashed a dazzling smile. We were paralyzed. I noticed she had two sweetheart roses pinned in her hair with a silver and turquoise beret . . .

"Jesus Rosa!" I gasped.

"Hey, Jesus didn't give me the contact lenses or the outfit. I told you guys I want to be a musician. Why not try to look good? You guys told me to knock 'em dead. By the way thanks for the roses . . . you guys are really sweet. This group is the only thing I'll miss about high school." Rosa then hugged and kissed each one of us on the cheek in turn. She then said, "Just like we rehearsed. . . let's kick ass! Wildmen forever!"

Silently we watched the other bands. They were all good, but we were pumped up now. As our turn finally came, we scurried about the stage to set up. We removed the music stands and chairs. The other bands looked at us like we were nuts. We did a sound check with the mike . . . we took our places. It was showtime!

Using my best announcer voice, I spoke into the mike. "Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to thank you all for coming. A special thanks to all our wonderful band parents and our distinguished director, Mr. Ed. And now, for your pleasure, the Wildmen Show Band!"

I stepped back playing my beloved tenor sax to Dave Brubeck's "Take Five." Gary sounded better than Paul Desmond on the alto solos. The crowd was loving it. We weren't worried about Mr. Ed going ballistic either. . . You see Rosa's brother and cousin were the policemen on duty (by coincidence?), so nobody, not even the elevator man, would be rushing the stage.

After our first number, I had to wait for the applause before I announced, "Please welcome our lead singer, Rosa!" She had handed her trumpet off to someone behind her (so no one would trip), and proceeded to the mike, making the sign of the Cross en route.

We had almost forgotten her sisters (the backup singers) when she took the mike. "I'd like to also introduce our backup singers, my sisters, the Hollywood Blondes as Papa calls them, Carmen and Consuelo!" She pointed to two figures shrouded almost nun-like in hooded ankle-length London fog coats, facing her at the foot of the stage. She turned to us and yelled, "HIT IT!"

We cut loose with the intro to "Hold On." Da-Da-Da-Da-Da-Dah! As we did, the sisters stepped out of the "fog" and strutted up on stage in sync with the music. Lord! Waist-length black hair, sleeveless white buckskin mini dresses (with fringe in all the right spots) and boots like Rosa's. They had deep tans from living in Florida and looked every bit the super vixens.

"Don't you ever be sad!" sang Rosa. The band answered instantly with "Dah! Dah!" while the twins bumped in unison. I was certain the mall custodian would be sweeping up male eyeballs later that evening. "Hold on, I'm coming . . . Hold on . . .," the three of them put their heads together wailing into the mike. We continued to play our hearts out, as we marveled at the Aztec Princess and her high priestesses at work.

"Thank you!" Rosa yelled above the applause as we finished. Before it was quiet, she yelled into the mike, "Are you ready, Boys?" "YEAH!!" we roared back. "Two-three!" she barked. Dah, Dah, Da . . . Da-Da-Da! We played the intro into "Cold Sweat."

"I didn't care . . . about your past . . . I just want our love to last. . ." Rosa was in her zone. She and her sisters were so hot, it's a wonder the sprinkler system wasn't triggered. They shimmered and shook, and bobbed and bumped . . . all the while singing like no tomorrow. "I break out" – Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah, "in a cold sweat!" Dah, Dah, Dah, Dah! They all three did the splits on that last chord!

We were in Wildmen heaven now. As the girls danced, we stepped, swung our trombones and saxes, spun our trumpets, and played for all our collective half lifetimes of

musical training were worth. We were really drawing a crowd now, and as they began to get quiet after "Cold Sweat," Rosa announced the last number.

"This one is called 'Papa.' It's for our Papa who worked in the shipyards and kept the family together when Mama died. No matter how tired, he always managed to play guitar and sing my sisters and me to sleep when we were little. Papa, we love you . . . one, two!"

The song began like we rehearsed, with the girls gently swaying, heads down. They began singing in Spanish, flowing along with the instrumentals. We didn't know what they were singing, but that didn't matter. Truly good music needs no set language. The minutes sped by like seconds, and it was over.

The crowd was berserk. They would not quiet down. From their midst, an old Hispanic Colonel Sanders-looking man made his way up on stage. Nobody stopped him. He began hugging and kissing three lovely and talented girls. He was crying. He was Papa . . .

-- Ken Tallon

Author Biographies

Sandra Al-Deen: Praise the Lord! I'm 43 years old and have 5 children and three grandchildren. I have worked as a health care provider for 18 years of my adult life. At this time I attend GED classes in human services. My goal is to succeed in all I set out to do. I seek God in troubled times and pray. (p. 56)

Glen A. Baldwin: I am now working on Reading for Today. I am learning a lot from this. I wrote my stories because I like to remember about the old days and how I used to do these things. (p. 73)

Annie Bell: (p. 83)

Karen Bowman: (p.34)

Martha H. Brinker: I was a young girl when I moved from Kentucky to Ohio. My parents divorced, and my mother still lives in the old log house today. I decided to write about the differences between living in the country and the city. (p. 85)

Kathy Brooks: (p. 37)

Andrea M. Calhoun: Andrea Calhoun is a mother of four—ages 2-11. She enjoys reading, relaxing, and spending time with her children. She feels reading is very important and reads to her children every night. Andrea hopes to write a novel about her unique life experiences and continue her education with an emphasis on writing. (p. 47)

Sharon Cavell: To begin I want to say that the Lord works in mysterious ways. It was that mysterious way that brought me to this transition in my life. I had a careless accident that

carried me into a goal-achieving world: the world of disability. At age 44 I'm a work in progress. I'm back in school and changing my career. I give myself a reward everyday and that reward is knowledge—cause I believe you learn everyday. (p. 20)

Amy Chandler: I am a mother of four, and I wrote this piece because at age 15 I lost my first child whom I still think of often. On April 9 she would have been nine years old. I am going through GED classes to better myself and get a better job to provide better care for my loving children. (p. 18)

Traci Cornist: I am a 25 year-old mother, wife, and student. I enjoy family outings, writing, and dancing. I am currently getting my GED and very proud of the rapid progress I'm making. (p. 77)

Paula Darovich: I am a student of Even Start ABLE. They've taught me a lot. After this submission, I have realized how much I enjoy writing and would like to pursue this. I am hoping to finish my class with my GED and keep in touch with all my great co-students. (p. 8)

Christine Deal: I am 29 years old. I started taking GED classes in August. I got my GED in December. I am now working at Genesis Elder Care at Somerset Center. I live in a camper without water or electric. It is a very enjoyable experience. (p. 93)

Phil Edwards: (p. 63, p. 86)

Pam Fiore: I have been a wife and mother for 27 years. Out of five children, three are sons, who are now graduated and together with their father run our own family business. Yes, it is true, Italians do have explosive tempers and thrive on drama. (p. 67)

M. Foltz: At age 70 I began to take classes in the LEARN GED program. I'm amazed at what I have learned in these classes. My desire is to continue to learn for a better life. I thank God for of my successes. (p. 75)

Mary L. Garrison: I just write about the things I feel. (p. 69)

Tracy Graham: Tracy's essay says it all! Being the mother of 10 children has created problems for Tracy as far as helping with school work. Tracy "jumped right in" and started working very hard. She brought her mother, brother, and his girlfriend to school also. She has recently gotten a job and is bringing in much needed money. (p.17)

Vickie Hargraves: I love to write. I enjoy writing about real things that have happened to me. I was also in Beginnings II book last year. (p. 6)

Sharon Harsh: I am a mother of three healthy boys and I am 31 years old. I am a student at Baxter Even Start. I hope to achieve my GED so I can get a job anywhere in the Canton City School System. (p. 5)

Vicki Hobbs: My reason for coming to Learn GED Program was determination to get my education. I know that once I achieve my degree it will open doors for me. I am 35 and hope that by the age of 40 I will have successfully reached my goals. (p. 9)

Frances Kay Jenkins: I am a 53-year-old female. I am presently taking GED classes, for I feel that you never get too old to learn and try to set an example for your children and grandchildren. I always hope they will realize how important an high school diploma is. (p. 49)

Stacy Jones: I am a single mother of 3 and 4 year old girls from the Urbana area. I am unemployed and started ABLE to

get my GED. I want to go to college for computers so I can get a good job. (p. 42)

Kum Sun Kim: I am a mother of two daughters. I have been in the United States for 23 years. I am presently working on attaining my GED. (p. 24, p. 51)

Norma J. King: I am a married woman with three daughters and eleven grandchildren. I care for four of my grandchildren. I work full time at Pierre Foods and go to the Learning Center. My teacher, Marty Lopinto, has inspired me to write—telling me I could do it. (p. 12, p. 91)

Zenia Kovalska: I am from Ukraine. I have been in the USA for five years. I came to the English Center last fall. I am in Level 5. I love to be here. Our teacher is terrific. (p. 89)

Harold Lester: I was born in Georgia in 1932. I moved to Cleveland in 1956. I've been at Project: LEARN about four years. (p. 82)

Lonnie Littleton: First, let me tell you I'm an Afro-American male and proud of it. I was born in Columbus, Ohio in 1951. What divides me from other great dead poets is that I'm unique, what you call a new breed of poet. So, therefore, I believe I'm the world's greatest living poet. (p. 66)

Tavia Lorenzoni: I am currently studying for my GED with ample help from my GED instructor Sue Conkle. I enjoy writing and learning new things. I will continue writing short stories and poems forever, with the possibility of making it a career. Thank you very much. (p. 70)

Ruan Luong: I am Ruan Luong. I'm working for Pierre Food Company and taking a class at its Learning Center. (p. 35, p. 51)

Cicely Mason: Cecily Mason is originally from Arkansas. She is a mother, nurse's aide, and friend to many. She cares more about others than herself. She has a beautiful smile that lights up a room. She has three children and a crazy, fun brother who is about 6 ft. 9 in. tall. (p. 62)

Tiffney McNicol: I attend ABLE-GED classes to work on my writing skills. I love to write different poems that are about my life. My life is full of emotions that can be written down on paper. (p. 65)

Regina Mulkey: I enjoy writing, photography, crafts, and reading. I have a two year-old son, and I have been married for four years. I am in school to get my GED. (p. 25)

Anh Phuong Nguyen: (p. 16)

Yuki Ohashi: About two years have passed since I began to live in Cincinnati. I go to ABLE class at Live Oaks because I want to get more English skills. Now, I'm enjoying writing essays from my daily life in my class. (p. 31)

Yuki Ohashi, Vicki Hargraves, Monica Bustos, Rosalba McCain, Sherril Knight, Kum Sun Kim: These students all participate in ABLE classes. Two of them are also participants in ESL classes. (p. 41)

Bart Rethmeier: Through my piece of writing I wanted to show my love for my father who passed away from the effects of lung cancer. (p. 23, p. 57)

Carol Rudder: I was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. We moved to the United States when I was five. I was raised in the Chicago area. I then moved to California and ended up in Ohio. I have two grown children and four grandchildren. (p. 48, p. 81)

Karen Safewright: Karen is a working mother of a young boy. She now works a daytime shift so she can attend the night time ABLE program. Karen enjoys writing and says she has written other pieces. (p. 58)

Karen S. Smith: I'm a working mother of two girls. I enjoy writing in my free time. It is my goal to help others through my writings. (p. 26, p. 36)

Sharon Sheppard-Scott: Sharon Sheppard-Scott is a divorced mother of four children. She works as a cleaner/cafeteria worker in an elementary school. She had difficulty in school, but through trial and tribulation is striving to succeed. (p. 3)

Dale Sherman: I have been a student at Project:LEARN for four years and am very involved in our student group as well as at the state and national levels. I am also a board member in Project:LEARN. I have two young boys who take books with them wherever they go. (p. 40)

Shannon Showalter: (p. 11)

Michelle Spencer: Michelle Spencer is a lifelong resident of Dayton. A mother of three, she likes to help others and read and write. She also enjoys a variety of sports including basketball, skating, bowling, and swimming. (p. 61)

Natalya A. Stare: I'd been studying English for a year before we arrived in the U.S.A. I've been in America for one year and a few months. I'm Russian and I lived in a big city, Saratov, on the river Volga. I'm a musician- I play the piano. I got married in America. I have a five year-old son who can speak two languages—Russian and English. (p. 79)

Dragana Stevic: Dragana came to this country from Bosnia and has lived here for two years. She has two children and works for Giant Eagle grocery store. (p. 74)

Ken Tallon: (p. 95)

Nora Thomas: In all my years attending school I always wanted to succeed. At the age of nineteen I began a GED program. My determination has enabled me to submit a piece of writing for this contest. This is a wonderful challenge, and I am very privileged to be able to do this. (p. 39)

Sherry Thornsberry: (p. 52)

Sarah Vinion: I am an 18 year-old student at OCCHA where I am trying to get my GED. By next year I am going to go to college for nursing. I have a son, Austin, who is 15 months and a baby due at the end of March. (p. 55)

Toni Whitt: Toni Whitt has seen and lived through many hard times. This makes it easy for her to observe people and sometimes to write about them. Even sometimes to just hear a story on the news makes her write. For example, "An Evening Death" came from a news story. (p. 19)

Helen Wiggins: I am 74 years young and like being around people. I do volunteer work two days a week and enjoy that. I live in a rural area and do some gardening and have some flowers. I have two grown daughters, three grandchildren and a great granddaughter. In my spare time I enjoy reading. (p. 78)

Cindy Wright: I am married with three beautiful children. I have enjoyed writing since I was a young child. I especially enjoy writing poetry. Any recognition I get as a writer is the best compliment I could ever receive. (p. 15)

The following authors submitted pieces of writing for this conference and for inclusion in the Beginnings III book. However, because of the limited number of pieces that could be accepted, not everyone was included. Each of these writers deserves praise for taking the chance and allowing us to read their work. We hope that each of them will submit writing again next year, when, if possible, we will be able to include more authors in this publication and at the conference.

Honorable Mention Authors

Anisa M. Abdullahi
Najla Aldahab
Oscar Arlnaza
Ricky L. Arnett
Scott Arnett
Herbert Ballenger
Dena Barger
Janet Barnett
Jovo Batkovic
Debbie Baugh
Emmanuel Bella
Mayra L.G. Bernardo
Monica Black
Isabella Borbely
Orlando Boswell
Glenda Brookins
Kathy Brooks
Latasha Bryant
Shonna Bundy
Joe Bush
Donna J. Butcher
Nicole Cain
Yashieya Colvin
David Casey
Vesna Cecez
Victoria Chan
Mihaly Chsser
Mary Chubb
Milos Ci
Ana Ciurcel
Nancy Clapper
Wendell Clements
Troy Cloud
Gaby Colson
Johnny Cook
Karen Craig
Mason Crockran
Euiko Csisfev
Misty Delong
Heather Evans
Amelia Fernandez
Marites Flick
Jean Fowler
Nadia Gaddah
Robin Gault
Angela Gorman
Margaret Guy
Xia Hang

Latasha Henry
Amelina Herman
Branka Hodzic
Brenda Hollon
Kalyani Jagadeesh
Jan Jay
Johny Jnbaptiste
Karletta Jones
Lisa Jones
Erol Kalender
Mark Kemper
Jiny Kim
Teresa Koszkowski
Judy Lapatinsky
Joseph Leach
Amy Lee
Marcia Lones
Hal Trevor Lutz
Etziboe Macias
Robin Manus
Zengda Mao
Georgene Marcus
Joyce M. Means
Carl Merchant
Ruth Miller
Linda Moffitt
Bethany Monroe
Sahera Musa
Jacqui Nageolte
Billie Newton
Robert Nixon
Theresa Nolte
Yvonne Oliver
Marcia Kpanlin
Jessica Parrish
Salene Passerrello
Renee Pearce
Livia Pechan
Nikia Perry
Catherine Phillips
Roxanne Porter
Edwina Radeke
Tamika Reynolds
Betty Rigby
Luba Rosina
Melissa Rousculp
Wong Sayrine
Barb Schwalbauch
Barbara Scowden
Christina Sheehan
Darlene Sheppard
Abigail Shehane
Floyd Smith
Robert Smith
Silvana Srbinoski
B.J. Stanfler
Jack Stuard
Carrie Styles
Theresa Swank
Mike Swartz
Camilla Thomas
Nanker M.L. Tillis
William Traver
Beatrice Trent
Joanne Turner
Sandy B. Turner
Patricia Van Hoose
Maria Velez
Adrian Vernon
Erna Vogt
W.J. Wade
Joyce Welch
Louann Wiley
Misty Williams

Tim Windle
Cindy Wright
Kathryn Yaden
Sun-ah You
Ardis Zupsansky